



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MA (University College London, 2011)  
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**“The Exhibition Landscape of Human Rights in Canada: An  
Ethnographic Study into Process and Design”**

Department of Anthropology

August 14, 2017  
10:00 A.M.  
David Turpin Building  
Room A136

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Andrea Walsh, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Ann Stahl, Department of Anthropology, UVic (Member)

Dr. Jill R. Baird, Department of Anthropology, University of British Columbia (Outside Member)

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Dr. Cara Krmpotich, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto

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Dr. Linda Welling, Department of Economics, UVic

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## **Abstract**

As places where multiple cultures, faiths, and artistic practices come together, museums exist as physical sites of intersection. They are at once sites of debate, dialogue, protest, and partnership. This intersection uniquely positions museums as capable of tackling challenging subject matter related to human rights and global justice. Through interviews conducted with heritage professionals from eight different institutions across Canada, this dissertation analyses the curatorial practices, methods of collections research, exhibition design strategies, educational programming, and public outreach initiatives of these institutions as they relate to Canada's three official national apologies delivered in the House of Commons for: The Japanese Canadian Internment during World War II; the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusions Laws; and Indian Residential Schools. This research considers: (1) how are human rights abuses that have occurred in Canada are presently being defined and displayed in Canadian galleries and exhibition spaces; (2) the nature of collaborations and partnerships involved when designing exhibitions of this nature; and (3) the role of both material culture and survivor testimony in processes of creating human rights exhibitions. As a multi-sited ethnographic study into the process of museological project design, the results of this research provide valuable insights into the challenges faced and the strategies deployed by heritage professionals when working with difficult subject matter. This research finds that emotional experiences factor greatly in processes of project development about challenging subject matter. Working with survivors of trauma is not just about creating a successful exhibition; in the end the exhibition is but one part of the museological process. Museological work of this nature typically involves working directly with survivors of trauma with exhibitions that are driven in development more often by the personal narratives shared by survivors and less so by objects in collections. As such, this strain of museological work comes with the possibility for survivors to heal from past trauma through the sharing of their experiences and this healing is part of the transformative potential of museological work. Additionally, this research strongly indicates that the flexibility of smaller, community-driven institutions where the needs of participants in the project are central to the curation process, stand as strong examples of human rights work produced through the space of the museum. As such partnerships between smaller galleries and larger museums exist as valuable sites of institutional collaboration in Canada. Finally, this research indicates museums are situated as key players in the ongoing development of human rights discourses in Canada. Museums create and contribute to the general public's legal understandings of rights and justice as produced through the pedagogies of museum practice, and these pedagogies come to educate the public about acts of discrimination, cultural inequality, violence, and genocide that have occurred in Canada. Such contributions position museums as public institutions as valuable to twenty-first century rights-based research in Canada.