

ICMEMOHRI SYMPOSIUM 2025

FAKES AND FALSE HISTORIES

Paris, France / 1 - 5 June 2025

Symposium Chairs

Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, Karen Franklin, Ophelia Leon

FAKES AND FALSE HISTORIES

At a time when political unrest around the world may be based on “fake news”, we look at the role of museums in addressing this issue when, at times, our own collections and interpretations are in question.

Attempts have often been made to attract attention by using various strategies to adorn the fake in the trappings of authenticity. Wherever truth matters, fakes abound, and history is distorted. The creation, distortion, manipulation, or reconstruction of objects and their cultural and historical information shapes and challenges our identity and experience of the world.

Provenance, the ownership history of an artifact or work of art, is considered standard for determining the authenticity and legal status of the object. However, provenance is often set aside, or a fluid definition of provenance is adopted when the object is part of the commercial market, when its supposed biography is compelling, or it fits a desired narrative rather than a historical truth. Our view of the world and our desire to present them as we believe them to be is reflected in the work of memorials and museums.

Fakes and False Histories will explore the use of objects, visuals and texts in the dissemination of misinformation, construction of stereotypes, and distorted histories. While fakes and objects without a verifiable provenance are often used in this way, instances of such misuse of authentic artifacts cannot be ignored. In addition, the symposium, Fakes and False Histories, aims to raise awareness of falsified representations and interpretations of historical events and developments for all of us.

Registration: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/icmemohri-symposium-fakes-and-false-histories-tickets-1280940751269?aff=oddtcreator>

in collaboration with:



mahJ
musée d'art
et d'histoire
du Judaïsme

ICMEMOHRI PRE-SYMPOSIUM

1 June 2025

PRE-SYMPOSIUM ACTIVITIES	13:00 - 14:00	Lunch at L'as du fallafel or nearby restaurants
	14:00 - 17:00	Walking Tour of Le Marais Numbers limited, please register early
	19:00 - 21:00	Cocktail Dînatoire in the 7th arrondissement with views of the Eiffel Tower, chez Sandra and Robert Gogel Places are limited, so please book register early. Address will be provided after registration.



FAKE AND FALSE HISTORIES - ICMEMOHRI SYMPOSIUM, DAY 1

2 June 2025, Mémorial de la Shoah

	9:00 – 9:15	Registration
	9:15 – 9:40	Welcome and Opening Remarks Jacques Fredj, director Memorial de la Shoah Jane Klinger, ICMEMOHRI Chair Emma Nardi, ICOM President (TBC) Juliette Raoul-Duval, VP ICOM Europe
SESSION 1 Terminology: Authenticity and the Visitor’s Experience	9:40 – 10:00	Terminology: what constitutes “Authenticity” Zahava Doering “Authenticity,” “provenance,” “fakes.” A review of the academic literature on the terminology we use. What are objects and how critical are they to museums? Understanding the public’s attitudes and opinions of objects better equips museums for their use in the dissemination of misinformation, construction of stereotypes and distorted histories.
SESSION 2 Misrepresentation of history: From distorted or tendentious presentation and falsification of history to deliberate manipulation in museums and exhibitions Moderator: Teresien Da Silva	10:00 – 11:15	Erasing the past, distorting the present María Gaitán Valencia The erasure of memory during the 75 years of internal armed conflict in Colombia has taken many forms: from the abandonment of sites of historical significance to the destruction of archives, murals, and even the political extermination of entire groups. These acts go beyond mere denialism; they constitute memoricide.
		Between memory and rewriting: museums as spaces of conflict and reflection on history Giorgia Ciolli The selection, interpretation, and representation of historical events in Memorial museums can reflect distorted views, whether intentional or unintentional, that address political, social, or ideological needs and can shape its public perception. Through three examples, this presentation analyzes the central role of museums, both in preserving memory and in constructing and questioning historical narratives.
		The Persistence of the ‘International Jewish Conspiracy’ narrative Aya Ben Naftaly The “International Jewish Conspiracy” narrative remains a pervasive force in the 21st century, exacerbated in the digital age by social media. The resurgence of far-right movements worldwide, the rise of global crises, particularly in the realms of politics, economics, and terrorism, has allowed these theories to evolve and adapt to old-new contexts, ensuring their persistence and widespread influence in modern discourse.
	11:15 – 11:45	Coffee Break



<p>SESSION 3 Constructing, questioning and deconstructing historical narratives</p> <p>Moderator: Ophelia Leon</p>	11:45 – 13:00	<p>Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Generative AI Nils Roemer This paper examines the role of digital tools and generative AI in the study and memory of the Holocaust. The rapid development of AI-driven text generation, deep learning, and digital archives transforms the ways in which Holocaust history is studied, narrated, and disseminated. While these technologies offer new opportunities, they also raise critical ethical and epistemological questions about authenticity, bias, and the potential benefit and misuse.</p> <p>Geschichte statt Mythen: Combatting historical negationism through research Jakob Schergaut A specific case from contemporary Germany exemplifies the crucial work of “Geschichte statt Mythen”. By presenting its methods and impact to an international audience, this initiative aims to inspire others – especially memorial sites and academic institutions— in the fight against historical denialism.</p> <p>Public memory and the heritage agenda Muthoni Thang’wa The future Kwa Luka Heritage Center narrates the Mau Mau fight for freedom and the brutal murder of Kikuyu chiefs and their families in 1953. Our aim is to transform the heritage agenda by shifting public memory away from false and fake histories, to celebrate Human Rights, reconciliation and the quest for transformational Justice.</p>
	13:00 – 13:45	<p>Lunch Break</p>
	13:45 – 15:15	<p>Tour at the Mémorial de la Shoah</p>
	15:30 – 15:45	<p>Coffee Break</p>
<p>SESSION 4 Looted art, provenance and authenticity</p> <p>Moderator: Anne Webber</p>	15:45 – 16:30	<p>How can museums navigate the complexity of the provenance and authenticity history of their collections? Judith Eisenhut Bejerano Using two examples of so-called heirless Judaica objects bequeathed to museums due to JCR activities, I present the research of provenance and raise ethical, challenging questions of ownership by museums of once personal dedicated, communal objects subjected to a context of violence.</p> <p>Emmanuelle Polack A discussion on looted art, research methods and its influence on exhibitions and potential restitution. Session followed by a hosted visit to the rooms of The Louvre to view examples of the works.</p>
	17:00 – 19:00	<p>Visit at the Louvre Museum</p>
	19:30	<p>Dinner</p>



FAKE AND FALSE HISTORIES - ICMEMOHRI SYMPOSIUM, DAY 2

3 June 2025, Mémorial de la Shoah

SESSION 5

Motives and backgrounds of forgeries: Commercial interests. Political or ideological manipulation. Scientific deception

Moderator:
Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek

9:30 -
10:45

Of flying discs, wonder weapons and the Black Sun - conspiracy narratives around the Wewelsburg

Kirsten John-Stucke

This contribution examines conspiracy theories, their origins and the methods with which the Wewelsburg Memorial competes against these fake narratives.

The role of forgeries in political storytelling

Cordélia de Brosses

Case studies that examine how the production of forgeries has played a key role in political retelling include the forged Donation of Constantine in favor of Pope Sylvester in 315, Lothar Malskat's fanciful fake frescoes in Schleswig Cathedral, forger Han van Meegeren and lastly, retouched photograph as a propaganda tool for totalitarian regimes, and the threat AI represents to the falsification of history.

Judaica collectors in search of identity and authenticity

Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek

The presentation focuses on Judaica collectors, collections and museums between the traps of self-assurance, of history and of the market.

SESSION 6

To what extent do curators and exhibition concepts influence the perception of authenticity and historical veracity?

Moderator:
Mirjam Zadoff

10:45 -
12:00

The Underground Camera

Erik Somers

In the final year of World War II in the Netherlands, a group of young professional photographers secretly worked to capture the true conditions of the war in Amsterdam, documenting both the German occupation and the resistance. The photos taken by The Underground Camera played a crucial role in shaping the post-war visual memory of the occupation. The presentation reveals our research of the working methods, organization, nature and scope of their work.

The War Heritage Institute and the Department of Remembrance

Ilse Bogaerts

Highlighting the core activities of the Department - Education and public engagement, commemorative initiatives, development of digital memory platforms, scientific research, collaboration with national and international partner - will show how the WHI deals with "fakes" in its exhibitions, emphasizing the importance of historical awareness as a foundation for peace building and social cohesion.

The Photomontage Works of Foto Ada

Sonja Palade

Doubly-marginalised as a female photographer who was presumed to be Jewish, some accounts of Elemérné Marsovszky's life have stylized her into a figure of resistance forced to lead a double life. Her recently discovered collage works were presumed to have been created and kept in secret due to their so-called political nature, explaining their absence from exhibitions and publications of the 1930s and 40s.

12:00 -
13:00

Lunch Break



Adolf Hitler and another woman, 1938.
Hitler, 1938-1945.
Adolf Hitler and another woman, 1938.
Hitler, 1938-1945.



Adolf Hitler and another woman, 1938.
Hitler, 1938-1945.
Adolf Hitler and another woman, 1938.
Hitler, 1938-1945.



<p>SESSION 7 Fakes and forged histories: The role of museum educators</p> <p>Moderator: Jill Vexler</p>	<p>13:00 – 13:45</p>	<p>The Spanish Civil War has already jumped on the Fake News bandwagon’ Iratxe Momoitio Astorkia and Idoia Orbe Narbaiza Introducing a didactic workshop, ‘Gernika and fake news’, designed to deal with ethics and history through a specific event in order to help students recognize the value of historical memory and learn to discern between fake and authentic news in developing their own critical vision.</p> <p>Addressing historical misinformation in the classroom Athanasios Vlitas Presenting the pedagogical strategies of a case study from a Gymnasium in Greece, where a memorial museum’s virtual tour was integrated into the history curriculum, will demonstrate the positive results and effective use of museums in the classroom to engage students, challenge misconceptions, and promote empathy.</p> <p>Jamali Kamali’s tomb and the inscriptions surrounding Mehrauli Archaeological Park in Delhi Shataxi Chauhan Exploring the discourses of desire, affection and longing during the Mdughal period of these historical sites, helps to show how current-day manipulation of history by government propaganda and media distortions have framed the understanding of marginalized communities.</p>
<p>SESSION 8 The object as witness or Countering fakes: Challenging stereotypes and distorted history through objects</p> <p>Moderator: Karen Franklin</p>	<p>13:45 – 15:00</p>	<p>Objects after Terror Lena Fahre and Anne Lene Andersen The 22 July Centre preserves objects and stories to broaden up the perspectives on the mass shooting on the island of Utøya and the bombing of the Government Quarter in Oslo. The authenticity of our objects –most of which were donated by the perpetrator, a far-right extremist linked to the “Eurabia” conspiracy theory- is one of our most frequent questions. Is the Center fulfilling his wish or achieving its goal to also represent other narratives?</p> <p>Challenging stereotypes and distorted narratives in modern history exhibitions Michaela Smidová and Eliška Pekárková Through case studies of public outreach programs, the presentation analyzes how museums can use authentic objects, particularly those related to minority communities, to encourage visitors to question narratives, evaluate sources, and develop media literacy skills</p> <p>Trauma Collections: from Forensic Items to Objects Nirit Shalev-Khalifa and Dina Grossman By presenting the academic and practical methodology in the field of object collection and registration developed by Yad Ben-Zvi alongside the Eshmor collection, we aim to evaluate and critique these procedures, their strengths and weaknesses, in order to establish object collections that will be resilient in the face of deniers of historic fact, misrepresentation and fake information.</p>
	<p>15:30 – 18:30</p>	<p>Site Visits: Mémorial des martyrs de la déportation, Notre Dame, and Mémorial de la Guerre d’Algérie</p>
	<p>19:00</p>	<p>Dinner</p>



FAKE AND FALSE HISTORIES - ICMEMOHRI SYMPOSIUM, DAY 3

4 June 2025, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme

9:00 - 10:45	<p>Welcome words by: Paul Salmona, Director of mahJ - Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme Claire Decomps, Chief curator and head of conservation</p> <p>Commented visit to the Exhibit, "Alfred Dreyfus. Vérité et justice". On view, the secret file: the army's creation of fake documents to prove the guilt of Dreyfus.</p>
10:45 - 12:00	<p>Discussion and Debriefing Ophelia Leon, Karen Franklin, Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek</p>
12:00 - 12:45	<p>Lunch Break</p>
12:45 - 13:45	<p>Guided visit of the Museum</p>
14:00 - 15:00	<p>Guided visit to le Musée des Archives Nationales. We will view an important forgery, a so called translation from Arabic into French in 1321 by a doctor from Acre of a letter "proving" a plot by Jews, financed by the King of Granada, with the help of lepers, to poison the wells. This document was authenticated by 4 officers and fed accusations, taken up on a larger scale during the Black Death.</p>
15:30 - 17:00	<p>Guided visit to le Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration https://www.histoire-immigration.fr</p>
17:30 - 18:30	<p>Père Lachaise (weather permitting)</p>
20:00	<p>Dinner</p>



ICMEMOHRI POST-SYMPOSIUM SITE VISITS

5 June 2025

POST-SYMPOSIUM ACTIVITIES	All day	Departure from Paris at 8 am by Coach for visits to: Historial de la Grande Guerre, Péronne Mémorial De La Shoah, Drancy
Event of Interest for the Post-Symposium: Festival de l'histoire de l'art at Fontainebleau. "le vrai, le faux " https://www.festivaldelhistoiredelart.fr/		



Useful information

ICMEMOHRI website

<https://icmemo.mini.icom.museum/>

Hotel recommendation:

Dièse Hôtel

131 rue de Charonne, 75011 PARIS, Tél : 01 44 64 34 34

www.diese-hotel-bastille.com

To reserve online, please use the link below.

For the lower, non-refundable rate of 150€ for a single or double room, breakfast included, you will pay upon reservation.

For the higher refundable rate, which may be cancelled up to 30 days in advance, you will pay at time of arrival and only a hold will be placed on your credit card upon registration.

If you wish to pay by bank transfer, please email your reservation to: reservation@diese-hotel-bastille.com with your name, number of guests per room and days of your stay.

When paying by bank transfer, please include the name and the date of your stay.

<https://www.secure-hotel-booking.com/d-edge/Diese-Hotel-Paris-Bastille/2MA1/fr-FR/?hotelid=5342&promocode=JUNE>

Please note that the number of rooms reserved and the special rate are only available until April 30.

Transportation:

We recommend getting the Navigo card for 2€ and adding a minimum of ten trips at 2.50€ each

Public Transport within Paris by Metro or bus www.ratp.fr/en

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