



# WHO WANTS THE WORLD? UNIVERSAL MUSEUMS, A WORM'S EYE VIEW

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laden ein zu einem

**ÖFFENTLICHEN ABENDVORTRAG**

Donnerstag, 14. April 2011, 19.00 Uhr c. t.

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin  
Dorotheenstr. 26, 10117 Berlin  
Hörsaal 208

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The universal museum, which stages artefacts from across the times and spaces of history, is the subject of much current debate. Revisionist histories today see universal museums as relics of colonialism, leaving them open to attack from two fronts. On the one hand, former colonies which are now sovereign nation-states, demand the 'return' of artefacts that were taken away from them. On the other hand, the museum's own communities (including those who run these museums) struggle to find a new relevance for these institutions, and resort to arguments about multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and the building of mutual understanding through culture.

While examining these discussions, the presentation will shift perspective and look at the universal museum from a worm's eye view, looking at the institution as it appears to those who live outside the metropolitan centres where these grand museums are currently located. Starting with the controversies that clouded the Musée Guimet's *Arts of Bangladesh* exhibition, the presentation will offer a re-examination of the universalism vs nationalism debate, and will examine the impulses and discourses around museums that have attempted to collect and show 'other' cultures outside of the West.

KAVITA SINGH is Professor for Art History at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. Her research interests include the history and politics of museum collections, the social history of Indian painting, and the application of narrative theory to art.



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