



# THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

***Museum Openings:  
Caring for Difficult Knowledge  
Within and Beyond the Canadian Museum for Human Rights***

An invitational workshop hosted by  
The University of Winnipeg's Cultural Studies Research Group  
September 19–21, 2014  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

## INVITATION / CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) is “poised to inspire,” according to its recently released 2012–2013 annual report.<sup>1</sup> As the museum’s pre-inaugural days count down, anticipation builds. What influence will the museum’s opening have on human rights discourse and contemporary museology? How will it represent and respond to cultural heritage and public memory/history debates? What impact will the museum have on local communities, and at the national and international level?

The University of Winnipeg’s Cultural Studies Research Group (CSRG) invites you to *Museum Openings*, a two and a half day workshop to be held at the University of Winnipeg, including a field trip to the CMHR on its opening day, Saturday, September 20, 2014. The workshop will provide an opportunity for researchers, curators, educators and students to reflect on the significance of the museum’s opening and, together, to imagine how the debates, controversies and energies surrounding the CMHR might inspire new museological approaches, and open conversations in other contexts.

This workshop builds upon momentum created by last year’s CSRG workshop, *Caring for Difficult Knowledge: Prospects for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights*. We continue to be interested in how thinking through the CMHR as a site of “difficult knowledge”<sup>2</sup> may help generate new concepts and terms of engagement for learning from difficult pasts – including histories of human rights abuses – within current practices of art, curation, education, activism and research.

This year’s workshop will also serve as the official launch of a new research partnership linking UW’s Cultural Studies Research Group (CSRG) and Concordia University’s Centre for Ethnographic Research and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Violence (CEREV). A companion workshop is planned for early 2015 at CEREV/Concordia University in Montréal.

Possible themes/inquiries for workshop presentations and discussion include:

- **HUMAN RIGHTS MUSEOLOGY:** What is a “human rights museology,”<sup>3</sup> and what are the possibilities and limitations of such a framing for learning from legacies of violence, past and present?
- **MUSEUMS IN DIALOGUE:** How might the challenges and potentialities of the CMHR be understood in comparison with other museums, cultural heritage sites, or memorial projects (and their curatorial practices, governance structures, architectural designs, or pedagogies of remembrance)?
- **CURATING DIFFICULT KNOWLEDGE:** What can we learn from the CMHR’s inaugural exhibits, programming, architectural design and outdoor “discursive environment” (e.g. signage) about how the “difficult knowledge” surrounding human rights might be cared for within museum contexts and beyond?
- **THE LOCAL AND THE NATIONAL:** The CMHR is the first national museum in Canada to be built outside of Ottawa, the nation’s capital. What is the impact and significance of locating the museum in Winnipeg? How might the views from here (of the museum, or of “human rights”) be distinct from those of elsewhere?
- **LAYERS OF PLACE:** The CMHR is located on Treaty 1 Territory, a historic meeting place where the Assiniboine River and the Red River converge, an area also known as “The Forks,” currently dedicated to recreation, tourism, commercial and cultural venues. What does this situation (situatedness) mean for the museum, and what does the museum mean for this situation?
- **ART & ACTIVISM:** How might researchers, activists, artists or other cultural workers be uniquely positioned to help care for difficult knowledge in relation to the work of the CMHR, or in relation to publics and counterpublics as they form alongside the museum and contribute to discourses on human rights? How might “curatorial dreaming” (critics imagining exhibitions)<sup>4</sup> be a form of such care?
- **AFFECT & ANTICIPATION:** How might we assess the affective life of the CMHR and its publics in anticipation of the museum’s inaugural moment? How do particular structures of feeling shape the museum’s capacity to serve as a meaningful site of cultural production, pedagogical encounter, and public exchange?
- **NEW TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT:** How might thinking through the CMHR as a site of “difficult knowledge” help generate new concepts and terms of engagement for learning from difficult pasts – including histories of human rights abuses – within current practices of art, curation, education, activism, and research?

**You are invited** to submit a presentation proposal including a title and brief abstract (100–150 words) relevant but not limited to the themes/inquiries outlined above, along with a short bio including your program and institutional affiliations, areas of research, and relevant publications or other contributions, by Friday, March 14, 2014 to:

Kimberley Moore (CSRG Project Coordinator): [ki.moore@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:ki.moore@uwinnipeg.ca)

Please also cc: Angela Failler (CSRG Project Leader): [a.failler@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:a.failler@uwinnipeg.ca)

Presenters/participants, keynote speakers and a preliminary workshop itinerary will be confirmed shortly thereafter.

**Who we are:** The Cultural Studies Research Group (CSRG) is an interdisciplinary group of scholars from across the Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Winnipeg. The Group is currently led by Dr. Angela Failler, Chancellor's Research Chair and Chair of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies, and is supported by the UW's Research Office, the Chancellor, the President, the Vice-President Academic and the Vice-President Research and International. The CSRG also supports and is supported by the UW's MA programs in Cultural Studies and Curatorial Practices.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Museum for Human Rights. *POISED: Canadian Museum for Human Rights Annual Report 2012–2013*. Printed in Canada, November 1, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> On “difficult knowledge” see: Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman’s “Speculations on qualities of difficult knowledge in teaching and learning: an experiment in psychoanalytic research.” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16.6 (2003): 755–76; also, Roger I. Simon’s “A Shock to Thought: Curatorial Judgment and the Public Exhibition of ‘Difficult Knowledge.’” *Memory Studies* 4.4 (2011): 432–49; also, Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson’s *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*. Houndmills (UK): Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; also Roger I. Simon and Angela Failler’s “Curatorial Practice and Learning from Difficult Knowledge.” *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, Eds. Busby, K., Mueller, A. and Woolford, A. (University of Manitoba Press, forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> On “human rights museology” see Jennifer Carter and Jennifer Orange’s “Contentious Terrain: Defining a Human Rights Museology.” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27:2 (2012): 111–127.

<sup>4</sup> “Curatorial dreaming” here is in reference to a forthcoming book by Shelley Ruth Butler and Erica Lehrer (Eds), *Curatorial Dreams: Critics Imagine Exhibitions*.