Museums in a Troubled World
Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse?

Robert R. Janes, Foreword by Elaine Heumann Gurian

Series: Museum Meanings

‘This book is quite remarkable in its vision and originality. The author’s ability and willingness to draw on thinking from outside the museum world produces powerful, compelling and genuinely new ways of thinking and seeing’ – Richard Sandell, Head of the Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester

Are Museums Irrelevant?

Museums are rarely acknowledged in the global discussion of climate change, environmental degradation, the inevitability of depleted fossil fuels and the myriad local issues concerning the well-being of particular communities – suggesting the irrelevance of museums as social institutions.

At the same time, there is a growing preoccupation with the marketplace. Museums, unwittingly or not, are embracing the values of relentless consumption that underlie planetary difficulties.

*Museums in a Troubled World* argues that much more can be expected of museums as publicly supported and knowledge-based institutions. The weight of tradition and a lack of imagination are significant factors in museum inertia and the author addresses these obstacles.

The value of this book lies in going beyond conventional museum thinking by exploring the value, meaning and role of museums as key intellectual and civic resources in a time of profound social and environmental change. This book is a constructive examination of what is wrong with contemporary museums, written from an insider’s perspective, and grounded in both hope and pragmatism.

The book’s conclusions are both optimistic and constructive, and highlight the unique contributions that museums can make as social institutions, embedded in their communities, and owned by no one.


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Foreword by Elaine Heumann Gurian

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Robert R. Janes


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