

Genius Loci – The Place of a House Museums in the Turmoil of Change

A two-day conference at the conference center Järvenpää House 17.11–18.11.2022

House museums, biographical museums, museums of significant lives, artists' and collectors' homes and atelier houses – house museums are known by many names and throughout history these locations have been generally treated with respect. Furthermore, house museums might many times be considered locations that do not change, ones that retain their almost mausoleum-type character. Be that as it may, there are nonetheless regularly occurring factors that force us museum professionals to prepare ourselves for constantly changing circumstances. Among these is the need to justify the relevance of our actions and to learn to put into words the value of house museums for the wider society. House museums are facing the same pressures as do larger museums, namely, to reach an adequate level of both social and ecological sustainability, to show strong signs of societal impact, to offer visitors attractive content and museum visits, etc. As funders might expect fresh initiatives, such as various virtual programs that produce strong societal impact, visitors are simply looking for an unchanged environment, authenticity and a visual peek into the past. These simultaneous but to some degree contradictory demands are placing house museums in a tricky spot. On the one hand they need to justify their relevance as permanent institutions and on the other they are facing constant demands for change.

We invite museum professionals to take part in discussing the future of this **significant sector** of our cultural heritage. The aim of the conference is to strengthen the professional network of house museums and offer peer support, as well as to improve the capabilities of these professionals to meet any future economic or operational challenges, since it will be vital for future museum professionals to actively take part in society's impact discussion. In Finland, many house museums were established during a thirty-year period from the 1950s to the 1970s, but there have not been major professional gatherings to focus specifically on issues critical to house museums, thus leaving the field in a rather sporadic state. We aim to start the discussion about subjects and challenges that unite us house museum professionals, to better bring forth the immense potential of these **significant locations**.

During the two-day conference we will focus on three main themes: authenticity, visitor experience and the potential of museum value regarding these **significant locations**. Through these themes we will seek answers to the following question: What kind of future will house museums be facing when we enter the 2030s? Our conference keynotes and speakers will bring up issues relating to the identity of a place, the potential of storytelling, contemporary reflections on nationalism and the concept nostalgia. Our keynotes are Cultural Heritage Researcher Caroline Wallis, Professor of Museology, Emerita Kerstin Smeds and Adjunct Professor of Political Science Antto Vihma. There will also be several professional presentations coming from the field and five hands-on workshops where participants will have an opportunity to practice and test their own professional skills in the field of significance of museum work, environmental consciousness, storytelling and writing, audience engagement and museological value discussion.

We thank the Järvenpää Art Museum, the Finnish Cultural Foundation (Uusimaa Regional Fund), the Mannerheim Foundation and the ICOM DEMHIST for their kind support.

Venue: Conference Center [Järvenpää-talo](#), Juhani Aho-hall, 17.11–18.11.2022.

How to get there: Conference Center [Järvenpää-talo](#), Hallintokatu 4. This is 100 meters from the Järvenpää train station (with several train connections daily), 500 meters from the Järvenpää bus station and 22 kilometers from the airport. Accommodation can be found either in Helsinki or Järvenpää (Hotel Sointu).

Participation fee: one day 40 €, two days 80 €, Thursday evening event 60 €. Registration will be open soon.

Program

THURSDAY 17.11.2022: Conference Center Järvenpää-talo, Juhani Aho-hall

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| 9:00-9:30 | Morning coffee and registration |
| 9:30-10:00 | Opening remarks
Organizers and President of ICOM (Demhist Yvonne Ploum) |
| 10:00-11:00 | Keynote
Caroline Wallis (Cultural Heritage Researcher)
In and Out of a Full House – Perspectives on nationalism, identify, heritage and sketches of possible futures for house museums |
| 11:00-12:00 | Keynote
Kerstin Smeds (Professor of Museology, Emerita)
Return to an Abandoned House – Place, time and identity |
| 12:00-13:00 | Lunch, Järvenpää-talo |
| 13:00-14:40 | Words from House Museums, Part 1: Visitors, narratives, fiction and facts

Sanna-Mari Niemi (Doctoral Researcher)
Possibilities of Fiction in House Museums (of Authors)

Salla Heino (Curator, Finnish National Gallery) and Heidi Kallioinen (Producer, Finnish National Gallery)
Dusting House Museums – Anniversary events in the Sinebrychoff Art Museum

Sanna Valoranta-Saltikoff (Curator, Finnish National Museum)
The Changing Roles and Narratives of House Museums

Anne-Maija Malmisalo-Lensu (Doctoral Researcher)
Visitor Motivation and Expectations While Visiting Alvar Aalto House Museum

Leena Hannula (PhD, Independent Researcher)
Is there a Place for Fiction in House Museum that Aims to Focus on Historical Facts? |
| 14:40-15:00 | Coffee break |

- 15:00-16:30 Words from House Museums, Part 2: Values
- Kalle Kallio: (PhD, Director, The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas)
Lenin Museum – Museum of a Persona non Grata
- Laura Gutman (Independent Researcher)
Villa Reire – A Study Case
- Ilona Tuomi (Cultural Coordinator, Lapinlahti)
Finnish Homestead Museum – Exploration into a Life Lived
- Juho Haavisto (Cultural Coordinator, Association for Rural Culture and Education)
ITE Art as House Museum Locations and as Art (ITE = Self Made Life)
- 17:00-20:00 Evening Program and Dinner at Restaurant Huvila

FRIDAY 18.11.2022: Conference Center Järvenpää-talo, Juhani Aho-hall

- 8:30-9:30 Morning coffee and registration
- 9:30-10:30 Keynote:
Antto Vihma (Adjunct Professor of Political Science)
Nostalgia of Time and Place
- 10:30-11:30 Words from House Museums, Part 3: Authenticity
- Lotta Nylund (Senior Curator, Villa Gyllenberg)
Challenges of Retaining the Genius Loci in House Museums – Villa Gyllenberg as a case study
- Tuula Juvonen (Senior Lecturer, Tampere University)
The Rainbow Potential of House Museums
- Ulla Kinnunen (Director, Tuusula Museums)
The Concept of Authenticity in Tuusula Museum Locations
- 11:30-12:30 Lunch, Järvenpää-talo
- 12:30-14:30 Workshop
1. Welcome to the Dynamic Museum, Leena Paaskoski
 2. Value Decisions or just Values and Decisions?, Nina Robbins
 3. The Identity of my Museum as part of the House Museum Scene, Liisa Oikari
 4. How do I Prevent from Sitting?, Julia Donner, Pälvi Myllylä, Tuija Wahlroos

5. Climate Skills for the Future – Workshop for creative writing. Henna Laininen

14:30-15:30 Panel Discussion, moderator Nina Robbins
Eero Salmio (Researcher, Helsinki City Museum), Julia Donner (Director, Ainola Museum), Ann-Cathrin Rothlind (MA Conservator, National Historical Museums, Sweden), Jaana Tamminen (Director, Järvenpää Art Museum)

15:30 Closing remarks

Workshop Descriptions (Friday 18.11.2022 at 12:30–14:30 pm)

1. Welcome to the Dynamic Museum

Leena Paaskoski, Adjunct Professor, Development Director at Finnish Forestry Museum Lusto

In this workshop we discuss the fundamental issues concerning museums: The meaning of existence, the superpowers of museums, vile problems of the world and possible positive futures.

The concept of a dynamic museum aims to gain a more impactful museum presence. According to this concept, the museum will learn to use its strengths and capabilities where these are needed the most. During the workshop host and participant voices alternate and the aim is to collect ideas as to what the dynamic museum could mean in each participant museum.

2. Value Decisions or Just Values and Decisions?

Nina Robbins, Adjunct Professor of Museology, Art Conservator, Curator

Have you ever stopped to think about the values that guide your everyday work?

In this value workshop we will look at collection care and make concrete choices between various non-ideal alternatives. It is a well-known fact that often only a certain level of compromise can be reached. How can we learn to make long-lasting decisions concerning collection care, or are we simply forced to find short-term solutions to satisfy the pressures of everyday working life? Is there a possibility that our value-related discussions remain as distant nostalgia from our study times, or does it have actual relevance to our everyday work? We will also discuss if there is any chance for professional consensus while making value-related decisions regarding collection care.

3. The Identity of My Museum as Part of the House Museum Scene

Liisa Oikari, Researcher, Mannerheim Museum

What are the strengths and weaknesses of my museum? How does my museum relate to the house museum sector in my country and internationally? What makes my museum unique?

In this workshop we will concentrate on house museum identity. Participants will look at their own museum from various perspectives. The aim is to deepen the understanding of their museum's

significance and uniqueness. During our session we will take a large perspective regarding the identity issues at hand. What are matters that unite us and what are the visible products that we have created out of our past? In addition, we will take the international aspect into account.

4. How do I Prevent from Sitting?

Julia Donner (Director, Ainola Museum), Pälvi Myllylä (Director, Visavuori Museum) and Tuija Wahlroos (Director, Gallen-Kallelan Museum), Time-travels and Utopias Project

How can we protect the museum interior? How do I take care of the environment of my museum? With what kind of means am I to tell stories of my museum?

This workshop focuses on the object security of house museums. Using the method of learning-café we will discuss and share usable ideas to increase the object security. This workshop is part of a larger heritage tourism project Time-travels and Utopias (2021–2023) which is funded by the Ministry of Education and organized by house museums in Ainola, Tarvaspää and Visavuori.

5. Climate Skills for the Future – Workshop for creative writing

Henna Laininen, Artist, PhD student in Art Academy (www.hennalaininen.net)

What kind of skills are needed in changing working climates? What kind of future seeds are sprouting in us and how do we put all this into words?

In this creative writing workshop, we focus on the role of house museums by discussing, writing about and experiencing any future skills that may be needed in the changing climate crisis. We will rehearse these things individually, in pairs and in groups. After the workshop participants will receive a reading list and environment-related writing exercises, which they can use in their work. This workshop offers tools for professional development and methods to use while engaging with museum audiences. Maximum 15 participants.