



Seminar

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*Museums, Authenticity, and Jingdezhen Porcelain:
Jingdezhen in a Global Value-Producing System*

Tuesday, 20 May, 11:00 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
www.swedishcollegium.se

S W E D I S H
C O L L E G I U M
for ADVANCED STUDY



ABOUT MARIS GILLETTE

Maris Gillette took her MA in Chinese Studies and received a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Harvard University. She is Professor of Anthropology at Haverford College, PA, where she has also served as Chair of the Anthropology Department and Associate Provost for Curriculum.

Most of her research and publications concern objects and the people who make and use them. She has done extensive field research on Chinese Muslims, publishing the monograph *Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption among Urban Chinese Muslims* (Stanford University Press, 2000) and several articles on Chinese Muslim historical memory, ritual, and material culture. Since 2004, Gillette has been studying the ceramics workers in China's most famous porcelain industry, which is located in the city of Jingdezhen in southeast China. She has published articles on porcelain entrepreneurship, copying and counterfeiting in the contemporary ceramics industry, and workers' experience of precariousness after the collapse of the centralized economy. Gillette has also made a film about this history, entitled *Broken Pots Broken Dreams*, and she has curated and co-curated several installations and exhibitions at Haverford College, the Peabody Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

While at the Collegium, Gillette will work on a book about Jingdezhen's porcelain industry, from the moment it first caught the attention of the imperial court in 1004, through centuries of government sponsorship, to the present moment of privatization. She will also conclude work on a short comparative study of Muslim foodways.

ABSTRACT

Museums are much in the news these days. The Delaware Museum of Art has made international headlines for its plans to auction four masterpieces in a desperate effort to balance the budget; the Association of Art Museum Directors has responded by publically censuring the museum for failing to protect "our cultural heritage" and "violating the trust in which the works of art in our collections are held" (AAMD letter, 14 April 2014). In Rome, the Borghese Gallery lacks funds to ensure proper climate control in its galleries. Years of pleas to replace the failing air-conditioning were ignored, and now the staff are opening the windows to lower the heat, exposing works by Caravaggio, Titan, Raphael, and Rubens to humidity and pollution from the city's heavy traffic. Indeed, Italy has recently exhibited severe difficulties in its ability "to maintain the country's huge archaeological and artistic patrimony," as *The Guardian* puts it (11 May 2014): collapses in Pompeii, destruction of a tiled roof at the 18th century Bourbon palace near Napoli, and so on. As these examples suggest, many argue that the value of museums derives from the authenticity of the objects in their collections (whether those be Picassos, dinosaur bones, 17th century libraries, or Ming porcelain), and define the mission of museums as protecting their authentic works and exhibiting them for public contemplation. Here I argue that authenticity is a powerful folk concept – not an analytic concept – in a global system of value production that includes museums, governments, international institutions like UNESCO, the media, and others. I present the theoretical underpinnings of this argument and give evidence from my research on Jingdezhen's porcelain industry showing the consequences of this folk notion. I conclude by asking: if we accept authenticity as part of a folk ideology operating in a global system of value production, how might we deploy this knowledge in our cultural heritage institutions? How might it "make a difference" for the public, and what are the limits to such deployment?