

# *Temptation of Permanence* | A critical approach to permanent museum exhibitions **18–20 October 2026 / Budapest**

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### **Temptation of Permanence** **A critical approach to permanent museum exhibitions**

Conference venue and date: 18–20 October 2026, Museum of Ethnography, Budapest  
Deadline for abstract submission: 31 March 2026  
Notification of acceptance: 30 April 2026

Is the permanent exhibition still a relevant, valid and sustainable format in the 21st century? How does it relate to the museum as an institutional form? Do globalisation, rapid social, economic, political and environmental changes, and the transformation of academic disciplines still allow us to think in terms of this genre? How can historical collections be meaningfully connected to contemporary society? What place does critical approach occupy in such a long-term project? How should museums position themselves towards colonial and other historical or ideological legacies, or towards present-day political expectations? How can a permanent exhibition remain meaningful decades after its opening? What alternative models could replace the traditional permanent exhibition? And why do many museums choose not to present their collections in a permanent display at all?

After more than eight years of work, the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest opened its new permanent collection exhibition in 2024 within the new building of the 154 year old institution. This display with a large floor area, featuring thousands of objects, documents, photographs and audiovisual materials, confronted its curators with questions that pose significant challenges to any institution undertaking a similar project, regardless of disciplinary background. For this reason, we invite museum professionals from a wide range of fields to join a dialogue on the nature and future of permanent exhibitions.

We welcome proposals addressing the following topics:

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### The concept and paradoxes of permanence

- What role does permanence play in today's variable and fragile world order?
- What traditions shaped the emergence of the permanent exhibition as an expectation and a museum genre?
- What makes a permanent exhibition *permanent*? Its content, its institutional function, or rather the promise of stability?
- To what extent is permanence an illusion in museum practice?
- Can we identify periods, trends or fashions in the history of permanent exhibitions?

### Permanent exhibitions in relation to museums and collections

- Does a museum today need a permanent exhibition?
- What role can the permanent exhibition play within a museum's mission?
- How does a permanent exhibition relate to a museum's collection, and how does it represent it?
- Can the history of an institution be described through the history of its permanent exhibitions?
- How does a museum operate if it has only one or more permanent exhibitions and no temporary ones?
- How does a museum operate if it does not have any permanent exhibitions, only temporary ones?
- What strategies might museums develop regarding the relationship between their permanent and temporary exhibitions? Do these two types of exhibitions engage differently with education, cultural consumption, scholarship, politics or critique?
- What starting points can we choose for a permanent exhibition — collection history, disciplinary history, thematic approaches, etc.?
- What is the relationship between the permanent exhibition and research conducted within or beyond the collection?
- Can the permanent exhibition act as a driving force in the scholarly study of collections? Does it genuinely broaden access, or just creates the impression of doing so?
- Permanent exhibitions without collections? How does a permanent exhibition operate, organise itself, come into being without a museum collection as its basis?

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**Permanent exhibitions and society**

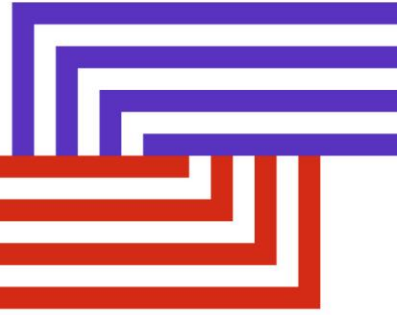
- How can a permanent exhibition support the museum in its role as a trusted public institution?
- What part does it play in contemporary society and in shaping collective identity?
- Whose identity does it reflect — that of the institution, scholarship, local communities or political authority?
- What can and cannot be displayed in a permanent exhibition? Ethical questions and political expectations.
- Can critical thinking be meaningfully integrated into the narrative of a permanent exhibition?
- How does the permanent exhibition relate to the changing systems of scholarship, education, politics, society and technology?
- How is its role evolving in museum practice and in knowledge representation?

**Questions of scale, form, visuality and technology**

- How does scale influence the language and visuality of an exhibition?
- Can a permanent exhibition be a focused statement built around a single object?
- Can multiple parallel permanent exhibitions coexist within one institution?
- Does the permanent exhibition as a genre have a distinctive visual language, and how has this changed over time?
- What is the relation of permanent exhibitions that are built on constancy and objects to technology?

**Sustainability**

- How can an existing permanent exhibition be renewed — partially, conceptually, or methodologically?
- What alternative forms of permanence might emerge in digital, flexible or community-based museum practices?
- How sustainable is the permanent exhibition today — environmentally, economically and intellectually?



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### Practical information

Date: 18–20 October 2026

Venue: Museum of Ethnography (1146 Budapest, Dózsa György út 35.)

Conference language: English

Organiser: Museum of Ethnography

Contact: Borka Bazsó, international relations officer – [conference@neprajz.hu](mailto:conference@neprajz.hu)

### How to apply

Please submit:

- the application form,
- the title of your paper and a 300-word abstract in English (presentation length: 20 minutes),
- a 100-word biographical note in English.

Please send your abstract and short biography by **31 March 2026** to [conference@neprajz.hu](mailto:conference@neprajz.hu).

Applicants will be notified of acceptance by 30 April 2026. Papers presented at the conference will be published in an edited, unified conference volume in 2027.

