



Call for Participation

Autumn School

The Democratization of Heritage: Towards a Critical Engagement with Inclusive, Accessible, and Participatory Practices

21-25 September 2026, Paris, France

We are seeking 15 graduate students and/or heritage professionals to participate in an Autumn school on the Democratization of Heritage. This Autumn School explores how museums and heritage institutions can translate the principles of accessibility, inclusivity, and participation—central to the 2022 ICOM museum definition—into everyday professional practice. The programme critically examines unequal access to art and cultural heritage, asking who is excluded, for what reasons, and how institutional structures, narratives, and practices can be transformed to address these barriers. Its main objective is to equip current and future heritage professionals and researchers with the theoretical knowledge, critical perspectives, and practical tools required to foster a sustainable culture of accessibility.

The programme is organised by the Chair for Critical Heritage, Museum and Memory Studies at the University of Cologne (Mirjam Brusius), the Argelander Professorship for Critical Museum and Heritage Studies and the Global Heritage Lab at the University of Bonn (Julia

Binter, Emilia Pastrana), and the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, specifically the Diplôme d'université "Pour l'accès à l'art et au patrimoine, outils et recherches" and the recently established "Museum and Democracy" Chair (Yaël Kreplak). It brings together Master's students, doctoral researchers, and professionals in an international, interdisciplinary learning environment compatible with professional and academic commitments.

The Autumn School will host 30 participants: 15 from France and 15 from Cologne/Bonn. They engage in joint discussion and reading sessions, lectures, and field-based activities led by heritage practitioners. A strong hands-on component is ensured through on-site discussions that allow participants to engage directly with collections, spaces, and audiences.

Theoretical inputs are complemented by group projects, focused on concrete outputs. Projects are introduced at the start of the programme, developed through guided discussions and site-based sessions, and concluded (and assessed) with group presentations. The group projects will be practice-oriented and linked to concrete challenges in accessibility and inclusion within the institutions visited during the programme. Examples include developing accessible interpretive texts on museum labels, designing inclusive guided tour itineraries, creating participatory mediation tools for diverse audiences, or proposing improvements to existing accessibility strategies. Where possible, projects are developed in dialogue with partner institutions to ensure relevance to real-world professional contexts.

This format allows participants to apply theoretical concepts, test methodologies, and receive feedback from both peers and experts. Ultimately, these projects strengthen analytical and collaborative skills, serving as a foundation for future academic research or professional implementation within the heritage sector. Participants will be invited to critically reflect on their own (future) professional contexts and heritage landscapes and develop actionable strategies for more inclusive heritage institutions in Germany, France, and beyond.

Paris activities will include a visit to the Musée Carnavalet, whose new permanent display prioritised inclusion; the exhibition on dissident queer and women's fashion at the Palais Galliera; and a round table discussion on Environmental Activism in museums and heritage institutions at Université Paris 1 (to be confirmed). Confirmed teaching staff will include Noémie Giard and Néguine Mathieu (Musée Carnavalet), Lotte Arndt (Université Paris 1), and Anne Dressen (Musée d'art moderne), amongst others. Social activities will include a sponsored welcome meal, social gatherings, and walking tours, which support informal networking and group cohesion while deepening the participants' understanding of heritage across national contexts. Participants will also have the chance to meet key figures in Parisian cultural life and visit venues such as Maison des Métallos, a cultural center in ethnically diverse Belleville, housed in a repurposed 19th-century industrial building that now hosts events focused on social and environmental issues.



Musée Carnavalet, Cour des Drapiers, © Cyrille Weiner,
<https://www.carnavalet.paris.fr>

Further information for applicants

The call for applications is primarily aimed at **graduate students** in heritage or related fields. International students enrolled at the University of Cologne and the University of Bonn are strongly encouraged to apply and must hold a valid Schengen visa. Applications are also welcome from museum and heritage practitioners in the Cologne/Bonn region.

Participants will work in small, interdisciplinary, and international groups—bringing together students and heritage professionals—to foster peer learning and professional exchange. **Heritage professionals** are welcome to apply; however, they are expected to secure their own funding, with travel and accommodation costs covered by their institution or a third party.

Assessment and Participation

Collaborative student projects are a core component of the Autumn School and are fully integrated into its academic structure and final assessment. The Autumn School is worth 10 ECTS credits (Uni Bonn) resp. 12 ECTS credits (Uni Cologne: Module EM 1 Research Practice, autumn school = 3 ECTS, report = 6 ECTS, 2 SWS follow-up seminar = 3 ECTS in the Winter Semester) and requires full participation in all activities. Assessment is based on the successful completion of a collaborative project, including a group presentation, peer review, and a short written summary (approx. 12,000 characters incl. spaces).

Practical Information and Funding

Participants are required to arrange and book their own travel and accommodation. Travel to Paris should be planned for arrival on Sunday, 20 September 2026 in the evening, and departure after 3 pm on Friday, 25 September 2026. Successful applicants will receive €400 in travel support, contributing to accommodation costs, as well as free admission to the museums included in the Autumn School program.

Two online sessions will be held in preparation for the Autumn School: one after acceptance in July 2026 and another in early September 2026. The July session will serve as an information and networking meeting, allowing participants to get to know one another and coordinate practical arrangements, including the possibility of sharing accommodation in Paris. The second session will focus on developing the collaborative student projects to be carried out throughout the Autumn School.

One welcome meal is included in the program. All other meals must be covered by the participants.

How to apply

Please send a cover letter (1-2 pages), including your motivation to participate in the Autumn School, a brief presentation on your research topics, as well as your CV (1 page) to ghlbn@uni-bonn.de by 07 June 2026. Candidates will be notified by mid-July.

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