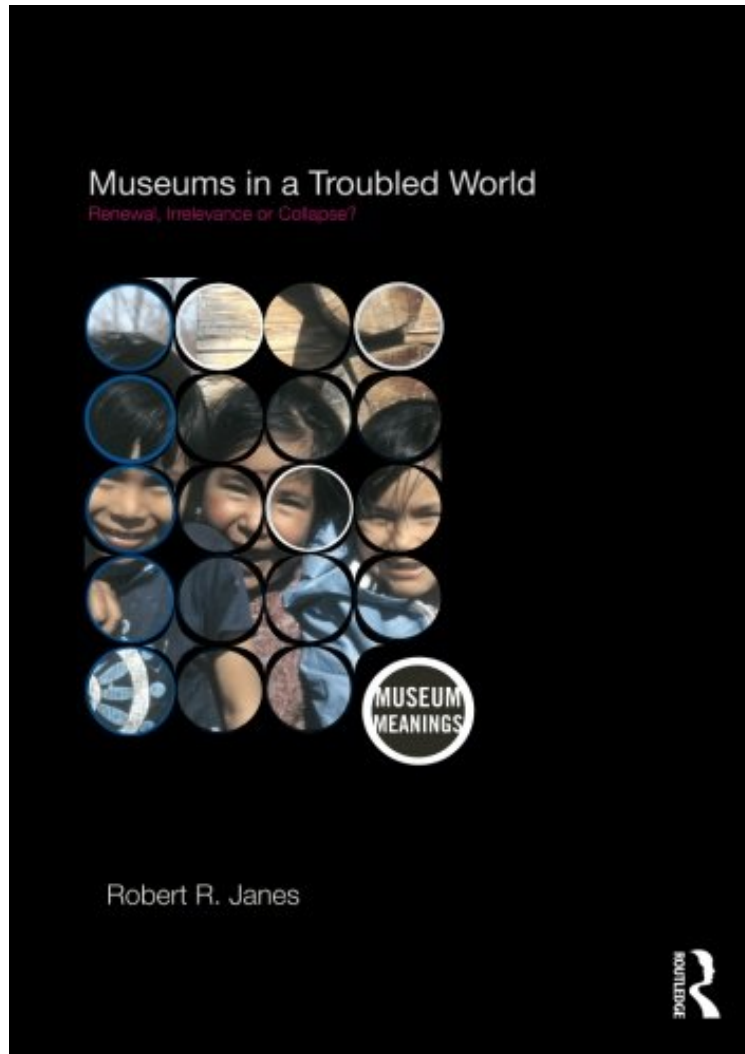


(Mobile book) Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse? (Museum Meanings)

## Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse? (Museum Meanings)

*Robert R. Janes*

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### **Robert R. Janes : Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse? (Museum Meanings)**

before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse? (Museum Meanings):

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great arguments, read in small sessions By Aleforge I had to purchase this for graduate school. It brings up some interesting points, but can be a bit boring at times as it can dredge on about some issues. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Museums in a Troubled World - from The Informal Learning Review By Robert M. West Book Review Museums in a Troubled World Robert Mac West Bob Janes, through

his writings and public presentations, offers an interesting, useful, and often challenging perspective on the current and future role of museums. *Museums in a Troubled World* explores the very important relationship between the museum world and the larger world of the natural and social environment of our planet. Janes' view is that museums have figured out how to do some things very well (e.g. exhibitions and collections) and are trying desperately to integrate these functions into the business/corporate world of the 21st Century. He is very concerned that this emphasis does not serve the best interests of museums and their visitors/customers/advocates and that museums are becoming increasingly irrelevant to the major issues that face society today. The book is a good and entertaining read. Many readers, me included, stop periodically and have to reread a paragraph, asking, in so many words, "How did he come up with that analogy?" or "golly, I never thought of it that way" or "that is complete horses..." This is good, as it means that he is challenging his readers and forcing them to look at their industry/profession through some distinctly different eyes. We often read of the continued search of museums for relevance. It pervades the writings of Liberty Science Center's Emyln Koster and is central to John Falk's recent book *Identity and the Museum Experience* (2009). But what does relevance really mean? Janes asks us to look both at the personal relevance of museums and their offerings as well as the much larger picture--how are museums relevant to the 21st century and its social and environmental challenges? Other issues that he approaches, often challenging the current activities and value systems of museums, have to do with the economics and operations of museums. Primary here is the metrics by which museum success is measured. Large numbers--attendance, operating budgets, collection size--dominate. Janes contends that these aspects of corporatism divert museums from their primary and essential social and educational roles. The emphasis on ever-larger numbers only requires museums to continue (or try to continue) what they always have been doing. This means more and grander exhibitions, including the feared "blockbusters," new and expanded activities which may or may not be related to or supportive of the museum's mission, and an obsession with fundraising and earned income to support these. Such "corporatism" is a major concern for Janes and permeates this book. Bob Janes is not at all alone in expressing these concerns and postulating their long-term impacts on the museum as what we would like to think of as an important element of the world's cultural and educational environment. The late Steve Weil approached many of these issues in 2002 in *Making Museums Matter*. Very recently, in an article in the March-April issue of *AAM's Museum* (unfortunately self-serving at the end), Maxwell Anderson of the Indianapolis Art Museum explored many of the same issues. Finally, the international museum observer James Bradburne, in a 2004 article in the *Informal Learning Review*, assessed some of the funding and political issues facing museums worldwide. Janes' book is an important contribution to the current museum literature and deserves a careful read. Please do so. Full reference: Janes, Robert R., 2009. *Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse?* Routledge, New York: 208pp. References Anderson, Maxwell L., 2010. A Clear View: The Case for Museum Transparency. *Museum*, March/April, 89 (2), 48-43. Bradburne, James M., 2004. The Museum Time Bomb: Overbuilt, Overtraded, Overdrawn. *Informal Learning Review*, March/April no. 65, 1, 4-13. Falk, John, 2009. *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA. 301pp. Weil, Stephen E., 2002. *Making Museums Matter*. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: 273pp. Robert Mac West is the editor and publisher of *The Informal Learning Review*. He may be reached at [ile@informallearning.com](mailto:ile@informallearning.com).

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 among museums with the marketplace, and museums, unwittingly or not, are embracing the values of relentless consumption that underlie the planetary difficulties of today. *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 these obstacles are also addressed. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, combining anthropology ethnography, museum studies and management theory, this book goes beyond conventional museum thinking. Robert R. Janes explores the meaning and role of museums as key intellectual and civic resources in a time of profound social and environmental change. This volume is a constructive examination of what is wrong with contemporary museums, written from an insiders perspective that is grounded in both hope and pragmatism. The books conclusions are optimistic and constructive, and highlight the unique contributions that museums can make as social institutions, embedded in their communities, and owned by no one.

'Ultimately, in sounding this warning so loudly and clearly, *Museums in a Troubled World* is a courageous book. It is Janes gift to a field that has frustrated him for decades but for which he still has great passion and hope. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 'Intelligent, passionate and provocative, Janes reminds us all that the museum can and must play a leading role in building a sustainable future.' James M. Bradburne, Director General, Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, Italy "I cant remember when a book has so engaged, enraged and encouraged me. Janes book provides a challenging guide for all of us who continually agitate and seek to understand the consequences of our

actions, renewing and refreshing a museums position in its community." --Museum I commend the book to anyone who wants to share in iconoclastic and original thinking about museums and their roles in society now and in the future.' Suzanne Keene, Reader Emeritus at University College London, UK 'Robert Janes is not only one of Canadas most distinguished museologists but a fine writer. Museums in a Troubled World reaches far beyond the exhibition gallery to become a wise and witty critique of the forces that threaten the cultural health of our civilisation.' Ronald Wright, author of A Short History of Progress 'Museums in a Troubled World, lays out the challenges facing the museum field in the 21st century and issues a clearly crafted, articulate charge for museums "to help create the future, grounded in their unique blend of the past and the present." This is an important work that should be read, and enjoyed, by museum professionals everywhere.' Ford Bell, President of the American Association of Museums 'First, a hot tip. Save yourself hundreds if not thousands of dollars on museum conferences for the next year or two by buying and reading this book. It explores all the issues that any conference will cover, and more. These are the issues that museum people and many others should debate vigorously if a sustainable futurefor museums as meaningful contributors to society is to be found.' Stuart Davies, Curator: The Museum Journal About the AuthorMuseums Consultant