

# Societal Collapse is Underway and Museums can be Unlikely Heroes, Suggests Expert

*Museums and Societal Collapse presents evidence and theories around collapse and extinction, while locating the responsibility of museums in our changing world*

NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, September 22, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Stressors like climate trauma, corporate deceit and political incompetence signal the threat of societal collapse, a new book asserts.



We cannot stop global warming, but we can confront the threat of collapse.”

*Robert R. Janes*

This claim lays the foundation for exploring arguments of ‘collapsology’ in new work by [Robert R. Janes Ph.D., \*Museums and Societal Collapse: The Museum as Lifeboat\*](#). The book also contends with the unique role that can be played by museums during a mounting climate crisis.

“Social ecology is an integral and moral dimension of the collapse and the crisis we face – that social and environmental issues are intertwined, and both must be considered simultaneously,” Dr Janes, a Visiting Research Fellow at the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, explains.

“Our collective failure to honour this relationship lies at the core of our failure as species. It befits all museums, irrespective of their disciplinary focus and loyalties, to bridge the divide between nature and culture in all that they do.”

Janes identifies six categories in which a number of key societal threats fall under, ranging from civilizational overshoot to ecomodernism. He argues that with existential threats such as climate change becoming more urgent, museums can provide a vital role to society by facilitating apolitical discussions about how we can adapt and survive.

When laying out the threat to society, Janes states that technological and industrial advancements ushered in unsustainable economic growth, violence and warfare, dispossession and genocide. He argues that this interplays with other stressors like political incompetence and corporate deceit, as governments worldwide plan to produce more coal, gas and oil by 2030 than is allowable.

Janes, who is the Editor-in-Chief Emeritus of the journal *Museum Management and Curatorship*,

examines these threats individually and in tandem in what he calls 'the madness of humanity.'

He questions: "Recognizing what we know about civilizational overshoot, ecological overshoot, climate trauma, political and corporate deceit and ecomodernism, is this not madness?"

"Madness that we in the Western world are failing to react with intelligence, courage, and dispatch to confront what is now being called an existential threat to our species, not to mention all we have created throughout prehistoric, oral, and written history."

He argues that museums are in a unique position to call attention to this so-called 'madness' and host discussions about how to address it.

Museums, understood as keepers of bygone eras and bastions of preservation, occupy a unique space within society with untapped potential, Janes states.

He suggests that as non-partisan knowledge-based organizations with a high degree of public trust, museums can and should start to move critical debates forward.

Janes suggests that their role remains largely unexplored: "Museums have a much more enduring role to play in society by clearly demonstrating that no one group or ideology possesses the sole truth about how society should conduct itself.

"A competent museum is testimony to the fact that a healthy society is a multitude of competing interests, aspirations, plans, and proposals that cannot be ignored in favour of economic utility."

Janes argues that ethical and conscientious museums should take a more active role in society by bringing pressing societal issues to communities, and hosting spaces where solutions can be discussed with a range of parties.

Museums and Societal Collapse: The Museum as Lifeboat unflinchingly examines the possibilities of societal collapse, resulting global scenarios and hopes for an evolving community-centred practice.

Janes highlights the necessity of a collaborative global response to the key threats he outlines, and hones in on the role museums can play in this landscape.

Although he paints a grim picture, Janes – also the founder of the Coalition of Museums for Climate Justice – insists that hope is still central to the quest for solutions: "In thinking about the uncertain future of museums in a world beset by unprecedented challenges, it is clear that hope is an essential ingredient in any successful outcome for museums, yet it is insufficient on its own."

Janes invites his readers – whether museum practitioners or not – to contend with the threats facing us as a global community and consider the roles we can occupy in the face of the indicators of collapse.

He says: “There is no question that we are living through the intensification of global climate trauma, casting the shadow of collapse. The underlying premise of this book is that each of us has something valuable to offer. There is no correct approach. We cannot stop global warming, but we can confront the threat of collapse.”

#### Further information

Museums and Societal Collapse: The Museum as Lifeboat, by Robert R. Janes (Routledge, 2023)  
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#### About the author: □

Robert R. Janes is an independent scholar–practitioner; Editor-in-Chief Emeritus of the journal *Museum Management and Curatorship*; a Visiting Research Fellow at the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, UK; and a Fellow of the Canadian Museums Association. He is also the founder and past co-chair of the Coalition of Museums for Climate Justice.

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Rebecca Parker-Ellis

Taylor & Francis

newsroom@taylorandfrancis.com

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