

Lecture at the Society of Greek Art Historians

Athens School of Fine Arts

3 April 2026

Prof. Dr. Bénédicte Savoy

Technische Universität Berlin

Institut für Kunstwissenschaft und Historische Urbanistik

Thinking About Absence in Museums

This lecture will look at the emptiness that art and cult objects leave in their place of origin when, in the course of history, through armed conflict, colonial occupation or economic asymmetries, they have been moved to be displayed in (mostly Western) museums - with all the political, economic and epistemological implications that this entails.

Bio

Bénédicte Savoy (1972-) is Professor of Modern Art History at the Technical University of Berlin. From 2016 to 2021, she held a chair at the Collège de France dedicated to the cultural history of European artistic heritage from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Her research focuses on the history of museums, Franco-German cultural transfers, art looted by the Nazis, and postcolonial provenance research.

In 2018, together with the Senegalese scholar Felwine Sarr, she authored the report *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage*, commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron. She has received numerous distinctions for her research and teaching, including the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize in 2016 and the Clark Prize for Excellence in Arts Writing in 2024. In 2024 she held the academic chair of the Museo del Prado in Madrid and in 2025 was a visiting professor at New York University.

A member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and a knight of the Legion of Honour, she is the author of numerous books. In addition to her influential work *The Long Struggle of Africa for Its Art* and the co-authored volume *Atlas of Absence: Cameroon's Cultural Heritage in Germany*, her recent publications include *À qui appartient la beauté ?* (La Découverte, 2024) and her latest book *1815, le temps du retour* (La Découverte, 2026).