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Title: Looking Through Portals: An investigation into stave church portals as display object in Norwegian museum settings

Abstract:

This paper intends to focus on portals of Norwegian Stave Churches that in their original medieval setting functioned as transgressive markers of the dividing line between the secular and the spiritual, the material and the immaterial world. Heavily decorated with elaborate carvings, and transferred to and displayed in museums since the 19th century, these portals offer a challenge to the modern viewer as to how their ambiguous identity and agency as individual ‘art’, ‘archeology’ and ‘science’ object can be experienced. This challenge was met in an experimental exhibition in Spring 2018 in the Oslo Museum for Cultural History. Through various modes of portal installations, the viewer was offered physical, visual and imaginary transgressional experiences of stave church portals. Visitors were thus offered new ways of connecting with and reflecting on their own archaeological heritage. The paper will present the results of the exhibition, the underlying ideas, and will include an audience response evaluation.