



Museums of the Mind: German Modernity and the Dynamics of Collecting (Penn State Press)

Peter M. McIsaac

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Museums of the Mind is the first book to explore the evolving relationship of collecting and the German literary imagination since the invention of the public museum. This study shows that in addition to redefining categories of art, history, and identity in modernity, the museum transforms the relationship between material objects and imaginative narratives. Using new categories, Peter McIsaac constructs a critical genealogy using key texts by Johann Goethe, Adalbert Stifter, Wilhelm Raabe, Rainer Maria Rilke, Ingeborg Bachmann, Siegfried Lenz, W. G. Sebald, and Durs Grünbein and the material record of Germanophone museums.

McIsaac rethinks how fundamental cultural “truths” define what it means to belong to acculturated communities, showing that the activation of meaning in museums depends foremost on what people bring, in their minds, to those real and imagined environments, resulting in what McIsaac calls museums of the mind. This notion elucidates the vital shifts wrought by museum culture over the past two centuries and illuminates how museums, literature, and digital media shape thought and behavior today.



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