

Workshop: Decolonising the Curriculum: Creative and practical strategies

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This workshop will share ideas about what it means and what it takes to decolonise the curriculum today. Our aim is to start a conversation across disciplines, periods and area specialisms around everyday practices of decolonisation in higher education, museums and cultural organisations. The workshop will provide space for theoretical reflections upon decolonisation and the exchange of practical, creative and pedagogic strategies already being pursued by the participants.

In recent years, questions about expansion of the traditional objects and methods of art history have acquired urgency in response to movements for social justice. While talk of 'curriculum decolonisation' or 'diversification' has circulated across the humanities, seeping into everyday departmental cultures and sometimes even officially stated institutional aspirations, scholarly, pedagogic, and creative practices fall short of lofty ideals.

Disciplinary inertia, alongside the perception that the labour of decolonisation can be left to those who have geographically expanded the canon or are perceived as themselves embodying difference, avoids confronting colonial and racist legacies inherent in disciplinary structures and habits of thought, and reproduces entrenched hierarchies. How do we contest the subtle kinds of centring that allow certain practices and knowledges to appear only as marginal or derivative? How attend adequately to the scholarship and everyday experience of those constructed as 'space invaders' (Puar 2004), whose very identities mark them as 'trespassers' in the physical and imagined spaces of scholarship and education?

The first 75 minutes will comprise short presentations by three speakers, followed by a chaired discussion. The second half of the session follows the format of a workshop in which organisers, speakers and delegates in attendance will be able to engage in an open discussion of decolonial strategies and applications at work. We will also showcase *Art in Colour*, a current video project of artist Jaelynn Walls.

Speakers and Abstracts

Decolonising Art History in a South African University: A case study

Karen von Veh (University of Johannesburg)

In response to recent militant calls for the decolonisation of knowledge we, in the Visual Art Department of the University of Johannesburg, have been reconfiguring our undergraduate degree programme since 2016 to address these issues directly. This is not just a matter of shifting geographies by replacing western art history with historical and contemporary African art in the syllabus. Instead, it is a carefully constructed integration of both western and non-western examples, which are used to interrogate art historical theories and categories. We believe that with this comparative and non-hierarchical approach it is possible to decentre western constructs of what art is – undoing categories of art, craft and material culture. We are also developing a store of relevant research from multiple authorial contexts – including African theorists, where possible, in relation to questions of modernity, colonial and postcolonial positioning.

There is a more complex side to decolonised teaching, however, that goes beyond curriculum and includes a shift in pedagogies. What is decolonised teaching? Our approach is aimed at more inclusive classroom strategies, and particular interventions needed for those students who have English only as a second or even third language. This is an area that is in need of constant development and experimentation. I would like to present examples of some of our methods for decolonising both the content and the practicalities of teaching global art history in an African University in the hope that it will engender constructive debate and raise further suggestions for the way forward.

Recalibrating the Compass: Community interjections and the jewel in Bradford's crown

Pamela Crawford (Independent)

Research into work by BAME practitioners by the Black Artists and Modernism Project has recently challenged assumptions about the paucity and quality of material from which decolonising pedagogy can draw. This has served to disrupt the accepted narrative of British art modernism by highlighting the existence of works by BAME and the nature of their relationship with the British art establishment.

The case is thus made for a strand of the decolonising debate being presented as a ready-made teaching resource, serving as an instantaneous re-centring of a skewed canon, through the acknowledgement of 1,200 works by Black and South Asian artists at Bradford Cartwright Hall (as identified by BAM's audit of public collections).

It is proposed that this vast body of work and its accompanying archive might function to destabilise art history's traditional hierarchy by offering a 'bottom up'/egalitarian approach using gathered instances of community and gallery encounter. For example, Bradford's South Asian community being encouraged to determine the content of an exhibition and post-riot funding being accessed to purchase new work, can serve pedagogically to initiate debate concerning the community's celebration of its culture through engagement with works of art and the difficulties in displaying colonial and contemporary works alongside one another.

The presentation considers how these and other instances might be made to operate in conjunction with reading lists, selected works of art and an overview with suggested aims and objectives. This supports recognition of the value that this 'home-grown' collection, whose origins lie within an 'othered' culture, brings to British art history.

Threading Global Feminist Encounters into the Art History Classroom

Erin L McCutcheon (Millsaps College)

The term 'community engaged learning' (CEL) has become a buzz-word in educational settings. Institutions are increasingly interested in offering courses that place students in direct contact with communities off-campus to assist in service-based projects. The trend in art history CEL courses is to develop projects that engage the local community, such as oral history, education, or community mural initiatives. International CEL projects, however, offer unique opportunities to support underfunded and under-recognised social justice initiatives, as well as create a space for feminist encounters that complement teaching global histories of contemporary art. Studies show CEL courses increase student retention of material, emotional empathy, and a sense of global civic engagement. The benefits of CEL courses, on the other hand, are often framed solely around these student-centred outcomes, leaving the community partner out of the equation. This presentation will draw upon my experience teaching Contemporary Art as a CEL course at a small liberal arts college in Jackson, Mississippi. My students partnered with the feminist art collective, *Bordeamos por la paz*, based in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. The collective works memorialise and protest victims of femicide and disappearance through the creation of embroidered panels, one for each victim, which they install in public spaces of power. Using this project as an example, I will consider the strengths and weaknesses of CEL in terms of efforts to decolonise the curriculum and will offer up practical strategies to navigate the challenges that come up in local and international partnerships.

Art in Color: Emphasising accessibility to contemporary art

Jaelynn Walls (The University of Texas at Austin)

Art in Color is a video series in which I will discuss and highlight the work of contemporary artists of colour. My goal with the series is to connect people (casual art enthusiasts, educators and students alike) with museum spaces and art works they otherwise would not have access to. The videos are meant to be comprehensive yet simple and educational. Though I am starting with artists and works in Texas museum spaces, I hope to eventually expand the series to discuss the works of several artists around the world.