

MEG Annual Conference 2026

Rethinking Relationships

Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

23–24 April 2026

We look forward to welcoming you to the MEG annual conference held here at the Pitt Rivers Museum! Hosted by the Rethinking Relationships project, this year's conference is a little different to previous iterations. Whilst we still have papers and talks scheduled throughout the conference, we are excited to offer a series of workshops on both days to allow delegates to learn, participate and disseminate knowledge in groups.

Important Information

- Workshops require sign-up on the day at the registration desk.
- Spaces are limited (approx. 12–20 participants unless otherwise stated).
- All panels take place in the Science Lecture Theatre unless otherwise stated.

Day 1 - Wednesday 23rd April

08:45–09:15 — Registration & Coffee

Old Library, Pitt Rivers Museum

09:15–09:30 — Welcome

Chris Morton, Professor of Material Culture and Curator of Photograph Collections, Pitt Rivers Museum

09:30–11:00 — Panel 1: Representation and Exhibition: Reframing Museum Narratives

Museums remain powerful sites for shaping public narratives about history and culture. This panel explores how exhibitions and curatorial practices are being rethought through collaborative approaches and critical engagement with representation.

Temporary Interventions, Permanent Silences: The Representation of Slavery in Contemporary Museums

Fernanda Quadros de Azevedo Costa — University of Lisbon

Alice Nogueira Alves — University of Lisbon

O Vai o Mai? Collaborative Exhibition-Making and the Story of Mai

Eve Haddow — Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge

Rosanna Raymond — SaVĀge K'lub

Salvador Brown — SaVĀge K'lub



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'Añima Ijeda / The Heart of the Community': Co-Creating a Community Museum in San Pedro Huamelula, Oaxaca, Mexico

Danny Zborover — British Museum

Santiago Valencia Parra — British Museum

Medardo Gutiérrez García — Huamelula Community Museum

Rosalía Méndez Petriz — Huamelula Community Museum

Daniel Espinoza López — Huamelula Community Museum

How Can Large Museum Institutions Engage with Small Arts and Cultural Organisations to Use Creativity and the Arts to Decentre Curatorial Authority?

Francisco Carrasco — Luma Creations

P. Max Alder — Luma Creations

Meghan Backhouse — National Museums Liverpool

11:00–11:30 — Tea Break

11:30–13:00 — Workshops & Activities: Sign-up required on the day

VRR – Pitt Rivers Museum

Courtney Joseph

Relational objects: Mapping emotional responses to museum artefacts

This participatory workshop explores how different forms of context shape emotional responses to museum objects. Participants encounter objects under varying interpretive conditions and register their responses on a shared “emotion board,” creating a collective visual map of affect. The session foregrounds how meaning is co-produced through encounters between objects, memory and interpretation, and opens discussion around care, belonging and the emotional dimensions of museum practice.

PRM Lecture Theatre

Sibusiso Mnyanda

Re-Archiving Resistance: A Participatory Workshop on Lovedale Press and Visual Counter-Narratives

This interactive, object-based workshop engages participants with facsimiles of Lovedale Press publications and archival images, including material relating to the African Choir (1891). Through collaborative annotation and discussion, participants explore how African intellectuals used print and visual culture to navigate colonial constraints and produce counter-narratives of self-representation. The session connects historical case studies to contemporary questions of access, equity and decolonial archival practice.



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Old Library, Pitt Rivers Museum

Juewei Fan et al.

Coding and Decoding the God

This multi-sensory, practice-based workshop examines how gods are materially produced through culturally embedded techniques and symbolic systems. Drawing on deity-making practices from Dali, China, participants engage in hands-on processes such as “filling the interior,” working with materials that act as symbolic organs. The session explores how gestures, materials and tacit rules encode divinity, while inviting reflection on how belief and meaning are constructed in contemporary contexts.

Life & Mind Lecture Theatre

Film Screenings

A curated programme of films engaging with collections, colonial histories and museum practice, offering space for reflection and informal discussion.

Collections Teaching and Research Centre (CTRC)

Collections Tours (Sign-up required)

Behind-the-scenes tours of the Pitt Rivers Museum’s Collections Teaching and Research Centre, offering insight into collections storage, conservation practices and research access.

13:00–14:00 — Lunch

Life and Mind Building- S. Parks Road/ St. Cross Road

14:00–15:00 — MEG AGM

Museum Ethnographers Group Members only

15:00–17:00 — Panel 2: Working Together? Collaboration, Power and Institutional Constraints

Museums increasingly emphasise collaboration, yet partnerships are shaped by funding structures, institutional hierarchies and uneven power relations. This panel examines the practical and political realities of collaborative museum work across different contexts.

Collaboration, Disagreement and Conflict Resolution: Examining Jos Museum’s Engagement Strategies and Community Involvement

Adeyi Adeyemi Jonathan — National Museum Jos



Collaboration Under Constraint: Funding Structures and the Possibilities of Postcolonial Provenance Research
Dr Jan Hüsgen — German Lost Art Foundation

Institutional Constraints and Collaborative Museum Practice in Burkina Faso: Colonial Legacies, Governance, and Professional Standards

Sabari Christian Dao — Musée National du Burkina Faso

Museum Collaboration Can Never Be Equitable: Confronting the Limitations of Good Intentions in Museum Collaboration

Heba Abd el Gawad — Horniman Museum and Gardens

Johanna Zetterström-Sharp — UCL Institute of Archaeology

Evening Event- Pitt Rivers Museum

6pm-9pm

African Community Connections: A Celebration

Thursday 23 April, 18.00 - 21.00

Free but booking required. Book your free place [here](#).

Join us at the Pitt Rivers Museum for an evening of music, conversation and shared reflection, celebrating the work we have been doing with African and diaspora partners.

This special public event brings together community collaborators, artists, researchers and museum colleagues for an informal evening in the galleries with a DJ, bar and a range of activities.

There will be participatory object handling and a basket weaving workshop in collaboration with African Families in the UK, live music and a workshop from Bantu Arts. Throughout the evening, a series of short spotlight sessions will take place across the museum to highlight the work our partners have been doing over the last year, including viewing artworks, performances, spoken word, and short talks highlighting participants' experience and specific histories that are held in the museum collections.



Day 2 - Thursday 24th April

09:00–10:30 — Panel 3: Access, Authority and Responsibility in Museum Collections

Questions of access, authority and responsibility sit at the centre of contemporary debates around museum collections. These papers explore how institutions negotiate competing claims over objects, histories and knowledge.

'An Arrowhead Can Leave Anytime It Wants': Indigenous Strategies for Object Collaborations

Olly DeHerrera — University of Oxford

Re-encounter and Responsibility: Working Towards Equitable Access and Representation of Shuar Tsantsas in UK Museums

Nicolas Crowe — Wellcome Collection

Managing Disagreement: Risk, Empire and the Limits of "Multiple Perspectives" at the Imperial War Museums

Sofia Cotrona — Imperial War Museums

Between Access and Exclusion: Digital Platforms and the Tensions of Equitable Collaboration in Brazilian Art Museums

Priscila Maria de Jesus — Federal University of Pernambuco

Sandra de Albuquerque Siebra — Federal University of Pernambuco

Milena Dobрева — University of Strathclyde

10:30–11:00 — Tea Break

11:00–13:00 — Workshops & Activities: Sign-up required on the day

VRR, Pitt Rivers Museum

Anthony S. Kalume

Performance as Enquiry

This performance-based workshop explores embodied and Afro-diasporic practices as methods of museum research and interpretation. Rather than treating objects as static artefacts, the session considers how performance can reactivate collections as relational entities, challenging colonial separations between objects, communities and meaning. Participants engage with performance as a mode of enquiry, foregrounding questions of authority, care, collaboration and ethical practice.

PRM Lecture Theatre

Rachel Fitzpatrick

Creative Health Lab: Reframing Collections: Creative Health, Disability and Post-Colonial Care

This participatory creative lab explores how museum collections can be activated through sensory engagement, making practices and collective reflection. Grounded in disability-led and postcolonial



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approaches, the session centres lived experience and positions participants as co-producers of meaning. Through object encounters and creative response, the workshop examines how care, accessibility and relational methods can reshape institutional practice.

Old Library

Ojesh Singh

London Indra Jatra Workshop

This workshop explores how Newah ritual practices are mobilised and adapted in diasporic contexts through festivals such as London Indra Jatra. Combining discussion, hands-on activities and collaborative exchange, participants engage with questions of mobility, performativity and community-led heritage. The session considers how museums might work with living traditions that resist static display, foregrounding relational stewardship and cultural continuity.

Annexe- Museum of Natural History

Marenka Thompson-Odlum

From Hosting to Allyship: Embedding Ceremony and Protocol in Ethnographic Museums

Across the UK and Europe, ethnographic museums are experiencing increasing visits from originating and diaspora communities engaging with ancestral collections. These encounters are often emotionally complex, spiritually significant, and historically charged. Yet many institutions still rely on logistical hosting frameworks rather than

culturally grounded ceremonial protocols. Building on recent international consultation with community leaders and museum practitioners, the Pitt Rivers Museum is developing a co-designed framework for ceremonial welcome, spatial transition, and relational engagement. The aim is to move from administrative models of access toward ethical hospitality and institutional allyship—embedding protocol into everyday museum operations rather than treating it as an exceptional gesture.

This participatory roundtable invites museum professionals, curators, collections managers, and community practitioners to critically reflect on current practice and help shape a sector-facing toolkit. Rather than presenting a finished model, we will use the session as structured consultation.

Participants will explore:

- Where existing hosting practices fall short
- How ceremony and protocol might be meaningfully embedded in European museum contexts
- What risks and ethical tensions this work presents
- What practical support the sector would need to implement change

Through facilitated discussion and collective mapping, we will identify core principles, institutional barriers, and training needs. Particular attention will be paid to avoiding tokenism, managing emotional labour, and balancing institutional protocol with community-led authority. The session will generate concrete feedback to inform the development of a practical, adaptable toolkit for ceremonial and protocol-based engagement. A summary of

findings will be shared with participants and the wider MEG network.

Collections Teaching and Research Centre (CTRC)



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Collections Tours (Sign-up required)

Repeat guided tours of collections and research spaces.

13:00–14:00 — Lunch

14:00–15:30 — Panel 4: Care, Relationships and the Ethics of Engagement

Collaboration in museums often involves forms of care, emotional labour and relationship-building that remain underacknowledged in institutional structures. This panel reflects on the relational and affective dimensions of museum work.

Before the Door Opens: Relationship Building, Positionality and the Pre-Collaborative Landscape of Bangladeshi Engagement at the Museum of the Home

Neela Khan — The Open University; Museum of the Home

Collaboration, Co-Creation and a Culture of Care

Sarah-Jane Harknett — Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge

Cultural Repatriation as an Affective Practice

Madalyn Grant — University of Cambridge

How Can We Move Beyond Discussing Ontological Difference to Enabling It Through Flexible and Changeable Structures?

Eve Barlow — Independent Researcher

15:30–16:00 — Tea Break

16:00–17:00 — Closing Session

Burning Questions - Non conference

Beth McDougall

Ask the questions and tell the stories you haven't yet heard at our conference together. Write your theme or question down in the morning break and we'll gather a group to help you discuss it. Space for 10 curious questioners.



Paper Abstracts

Panel 1

Temporary Interventions, Permanent Silences: The Representation of Slavery in Contemporary Museums

Fernanda Quadros de Azevedo Costa — University of Lisbon

Alice Nogueira Alves — University of Lisbon

Initiatives addressing colonial legacies in Portuguese museums have increasingly emerged through temporary exhibitions and public programmes designed to engage audiences with sensitive historical themes. While some of these initiatives reflect an institutional willingness to dialogue with representatives of previously marginalised communities, their provisional nature raises questions about whether such interventions lead to lasting structural change.

Drawing on critical museology and decolonial perspectives, recent analyses argue that contemporary museum practices operate within an ethical framework characteristic of the twenty-first century, demanding accountability towards historically marginalised subjects and greater transparency in narrative construction. In this context, temporary formats often enable museums to introduce plural perspectives, revise terminology, and incorporate community voices that challenge inherited colonial representations.

However, these initiatives frequently remain detached from permanent exhibitions and collection displays, where stable narratives continue to reproduce silences, chronological compartmentalisation, or simplified representations of slavery, allowing institutions to acknowledge contested histories without substantially altering long-term interpretative structures.

These dynamics place museum professionals at the heart of an ethical dilemma: balancing institutional continuity with the responsibility to address historical injustice through sustained structural change. Therefore, confronting slavery within museum narratives requires moving beyond episodic interventions towards lasting curatorial and institutional commitments capable of reshaping collections, interpretation, and public memory.

This presentation aims to share the results of a research project that examined Portuguese museums' approaches to the history of slavery of African and American peoples, as addressed today in permanent or long-term exhibitions, and how temporary exhibitions have contributed (or not) to their change.

O Vai o Mai? Collaborative Exhibition-Making and the Story of Mai

Eve Hadow — Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge

Rosanna Raymond — SaVĀge K'lub

Salvador Brown — SaVĀge K'lub



Early on the morning of 16 October 2025, we gathered outside in excited anticipation awaiting the delayed arrival of Sir Joshua Reynolds' 1776 'Portrait of Mai' to Cambridge. Born on Ra'iātea island in current day French Polynesia, Mai was the first Pasifika person to visit England. The timing of the painting's arrival was particularly resonant as Mai had visited Cambridge just over 251 years earlier, on 10 October 1774. At over 2 metres high, his portrait was central to the Tau o Mai | Journeys with Mai exhibition hosted by the Fitzwilliam Museum.

This paper reflects on Tau o Mai as a collaborative project involving multidisciplinary Pasifika arts collective SaVāge K'lub, MAA (Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology), and the Fitzwilliam. The exhibition brought Mai into dialogue with artworks created by contemporary artists based in Tahiti and Aotearoa New Zealand and 18th century ta'oa/taonga currently cared for at MAA.

Our paper speaks to creative disruptions to institutional and art historical approaches, questioning accepted narratives around this iconic portrait, and examining the ways that museums and artists work together with diverse and sometimes competing perspectives and priorities. We reflect on the challenges of working across geographical and cultural boundaries and consider Mai and the ta'oa/taonga as active collaborators in the process.

'Añima Ijeda / The Heart of the Community': Co-Creating a Community Museum in San Pedro Huamelula, Oaxaca, Mexico

Danny Zborover — British Museum

Santiago Valencia Parra — British Museum

Medardo Gutiérrez García — Huamelula Community Museum

Rosalía Méndez Petriz — Huamelula Community Museum

Daniel Espinoza López — Huamelula Community Museum

The museum in the Chontal community of San Pedro Huamelula was co-created and co-curated in 2024 and 2025 by a multi-institutional and international team from Mexico, the UK, and the US. Emerging out of long-standing projects in the region and a new collaboration between Huamelula's Museum Committee and the Santo Domingo Centre of Excellence for Latin American Research (SDCELAR), British Museum curators worked together with Indigenous knowledge-holders to untangle colonial histories encapsulated within local traditions and Mexican collections held in UK institutions.

Moving away from collaborative projects that are limited to the involved individuals and mostly benefit the funding institutions, the project was initially conceived to deliver long-lasting and sustainable public impact in the community of origin. The most promising output to date is the first museum in the Chontal coastal region, dedicated to the cultural legacies and enduring interactions between the Chontal people, the UK, and the world.

In this talk we focus on the premise and promise of such inter-institutional and international partnerships, as well some of its challenges: logistical, infrastructural, curatorial, political, and technological, among others. We will also reflect on the fragile legacy of such partnerships, and the difficulty of maintaining the momentum in the face of limited capacities, funding shortages, and dwindling interests.

How Can Large Museum Institutions Engage with Small Arts and Cultural Organisations to Use Creativity and the Arts to Decentre Curatorial Authority?



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Francisco Carrasco – Luma Creations

P. Max Alder — Luma Creations

Meghan Backhouse — National Museums Liverpool

The project lead team from Liverpool’s World Museum and Arts Council England NPO, LUMA Creations, will give a presentation on the Cuerpos del Tiempo project which centres on the redisplay the 16th century Mixteca Codex.

It will cover:

Understanding the difference between commissioning and partnership, where the skills and knowledge of the community-based organisation are essential to defining and delivering the project outcomes.

How important is it to know who it is you want to work with? Both partners had extensive knowledge and experience of working with key staff within each organisation.

Creating and passing a mutually acceptable Partnership Agreement.

What impact did the arts and creative input/output have on the project?

Can a partnership like this ever truly seek out, identify and adopt the diverse wants and needs of the communities it is hoping to engage with?

Key take aways for attendees:

How important partners’ prior knowledge is of each other?

Accept that someone must make the final artistic decisions.

Museum staff must have utmost confidence in their community partners to successfully ‘sell’ the ideas and delivery methods to the institution’s governance and operational structures.

Community partners must have the utmost confidence that the institution will fully honour what has been agreed, so that engaged communities feel they are being taken seriously.

Panel 2

Collaboration, Disagreement and Conflict Resolution: Examining Jos Museum’s Engagement Strategies and Community Involvement

Adeyi Adeyemi Jonathan — National Museum Jos

Collaboration in museums is often celebrated as a pathway to inclusivity, yet programmes between the National Museum Jos and community stakeholders reveal how collaboration can also expose deep disagreements and conflicting interpretations. This paper examines how multiple perspectives: those of local communities, museum professionals, government officials, and international partners intersect and sometimes clash during collaborative events.

For decades, Plateau State, where Jos Museum is located, has faced attacks from insurgent groups, leading to displacement and insecurity. In response, the museum has sought to contribute to community well-being by offering platforms for engagement. Chief among these is the International Museum Day celebration, which



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brings together diverse stakeholders with differing expectations. Communities seek recognition of their cultural authority, museum staff emphasize institutional narratives, while external partners promote global heritage frameworks. These encounters often produce moments of tension, where interpretations of cultural heritage diverge and claims to authority conflict. Disagreements emerge over representation, ownership of narratives, and the uneven distribution of risks and benefits.

This paper argues that such conflicts are not failures but are central to understanding the limits and possibilities of equitable collaboration. By analysing how disagreements were negotiated through dialogue, compromise, and sometimes refusal. It highlights the fragile balance between institutional accountability and community agency. It asks: when does collaboration genuinely redistribute interpretive authority, and when does it merely repackage institutional control under the guise of inclusivity?

Through the lens of Jos Museum's International Museum Day, this paper contributes to broader debates on museum collaboration, showing how conflict and disagreement can be productive forces that unsettle routines and challenge hierarchies.

Collaboration Under Constraint: Funding Structures and the Possibilities of Postcolonial Provenance Research

Dr Jan Hüsgen — German Lost Art Foundation

Collaboration has become a central principle in museum work with collections from colonial contexts. Partnerships with researchers, communities, and institutions in countries of origin are widely presented as essential to provenance research and to broader processes of decolonising museums. Yet collaboration does not take place in a vacuum. It is shaped by institutional frameworks, administrative procedures, and, crucially, funding structures.

This paper examines how funding conditions influence the forms that collaboration can take. Drawing on experiences from funding postcolonial provenance research in Germany, it explores how application procedures, project structures, reporting requirements, and accountability mechanisms shape collaborative practices. While funding schemes increasingly encourage cooperation, they may also privilege certain institutional partners, working methods, and temporalities, thereby reproducing structural asymmetries.

Focusing on an evaluation of funding postcolonial provenance research at the Department for Cultural Goods and Collections from Colonial Contexts at the German Lost Art Foundation, the paper analyses collaboration not only as an ethical aspiration but as a practice negotiated within bureaucratic and financial constraints. It asks: What kinds of collaboration are made possible through current funding models, and which forms remain difficult to realise? How do funding structures affect trust, reciprocity, and long-term relationships with partners?

By shifting the perspective from collaboration as an ideal to collaboration as an institutionally mediated practice, the paper argues that efforts to decolonise museum work must also critically address the infrastructures that shape collaboration from the outset.

Institutional Constraints and Collaborative Museum Practice in Burkina Faso: Colonial Legacies, Governance, and Professional Standards



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Sabari Christian Dao — Musée National du Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, collaborative initiatives between national museums and local communities operate within institutional frameworks shaped by historical legacies and structural constraints. Focusing on the Musée National du Burkina Faso, this paper examines how colonial inheritances, public governance systems, and professional museum standards influence - and at times restrict - participatory practices.

Colonial-era classificatory models and exhibition paradigms continue to structure the production and validation of heritage knowledge, often reinforcing implicit hierarchies between institutional expertise and community-based epistemologies. Although collaborative discourse has gained prominence in contemporary museology, decision-making processes frequently remain centralized, limiting the redistribution of interpretive authority.

At the governance level, administrative regulations, standardized financial procedures, and dependence on state funding reduce operational flexibility. Budgetary cycles and accountability mechanisms rarely align with community temporalities or relational modes of engagement, creating structural tensions within collaborative projects.

Furthermore, international professional standards in conservation, documentation, and collections management may conflict with local cultural logics grounded in ritual use, circulation, and collective custodianship of heritage objects.

Drawing on qualitative research combining institutional analysis and field observation, this study argues that collaboration in Burkina Faso is less a stabilized model than an ongoing negotiation shaped by asymmetries, regulatory frameworks, and resource limitations. It explores how such constraints also generate adaptive strategies and context-specific reconfigurations of collaborative practice.

Museum Collaboration Can Never Be Equitable: Confronting the Limitations of Good Intentions in Museum Collaboration

Heba Abd el Gawad — Horniman Museum and Gardens

Johanna Zetterström-Sharp — UCL Institute of Archaeology

Over the past decade, museums have increasingly positioned collaboration as a corrective to colonial legacies embedded in their collections and practices. Partnerships with communities are frequently framed as opportunities for equitable exchange, shared authority, and institutional transformation. Yet the lived realities of collaborative practice often reveal the limits of these claims. Drawing on our collaboration in the development of the All Eyes on Her! project and display at the Horniman Museum and Gardens, we critically reflect on our attempt—and failure—to challenge institutional structures through the development of an Egyptian community stewardship model.

Rather than presenting our collaboration as a successful model, we interrogate the structural conditions that make equitable collaboration impossible within museum institutions shaped by colonial structures, funding priorities, and entrenched bureaucratic authority. While projects may be driven by sincere intentions, institutional frameworks ultimately determine who is invited to participate, whose labour is compensated, which forms of knowledge are legitimised, and how far critique can extend before it becomes institutionally uncomfortable. Good intentions alone cannot resolve these structural imbalances. In this sense, collaboration often functions less as a redistribution of power than as a managed negotiation within systems that remain fundamentally unchanged.



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Grounded in our lived experience of the everyday practice of museum–community collaboration, we argue that the sector’s celebration of “radical transparency,” openness, and honesty frequently mistakes basic ethical obligations for transformative practice. By foregrounding the tensions, compromises, and refusals encountered in *All Eyes on Her!*, we call for a more realistic and self-critical approach to collaboration- one that abandons the myth of equitable collaboration and develops more honest frameworks that acknowledge, rather than obscure, the limits of good intention.

Panel 3

‘An Arrowhead Can Leave Anytime It Wants’: Indigenous Strategies for Object Collaborations

Olly DeHerrera — University of Oxford

This paper develops upon my experience as an Indigenous researcher working with ancestral collections from Southwestern United States at the Pitt Rivers Museum. Reflecting on my great-uncle’s teaching that ‘an arrowhead can leave anytime it wants’, this paper will consider how Indigenous sensibilities may move the museum towards its desires for equitable collaboration by treating objects as research collaborators.

A growing body of scholarship positions the museum as an ethnographic fieldsite, yet stops short of properly extending participant status to the objects within it. Re-centring Indigenous knowledge and material ontologies, this paper will consider implications of questions like: How do we ethically recruit objects as participants? Does object consent make a difference in research? How should research benefit objects as participants? Reflecting on my own research journeys, I will discuss how I incorporated strategies of care and partnership into my research with ancestral objects, approaching them as collaborators and allowing them to challenge my own conceptualisation of the museum.

This paper further engages the theoretical underpinnings of 'collaboration' in anthropology, foregrounding Indigenous critiques of the 'ontological turn' as neo-colonial and arguing that an excessive outward gaze in the search for decolonial collaboration may itself reproduce extractivist logics. I will instead demonstrate how Indigenous methodologies such as ‘Keeoukaywin/visiting’ open up new collaborative possibilities dwelling inside the museum, honouring an object’s ability to collaborate in research.

Re-encounter and Responsibility: Working Towards Equitable Access and Representation of Shuar Tsantsas in UK Museums

Nicolas Crowe — Wellcome Collection

This presentation reflects on the Shuar Tsantsa Project, initiated in 2017 as a collaboration between Shuar federations, Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), and the Pitt Rivers Museum, joined since 2024 by the Wellcome Collection, British Museum, and Science Museum Group.

In October 2025, Shuar political leaders and knowledge keepers visited UK collections to encounter tsantsas (shrunken heads) in storage — described by Santiago Utitiaj as a reencuentro con los abuelos (re-encounter with the grandparents) and framed by Jefferson Pullaguari Acacho’s insistence that tsantsas are spirits requiring ritual permission before they can be approached or displayed.

The session combines a brief framing, screening of a ten-minute film, and concluding reflection. The film documents ceremonial protocols: faces painted with achiote for protection, greetings to the ancestors, and the



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requirement that tsantsas be kept upright. These acts foreground a “Living Culture” approach to stewardship, positioning care as negotiated practice rather than purely technical procedure.

Joining collections across institutions, the project enabled the first comparative review of more than seventy tsantsas. This access allowed delegates and researchers to reassess earlier academic assumptions, many shaped by projection rather than sustained material comparison. The film captures debates over authenticity — including distinctions between “tsantsa express” (commercial items) and ceremonial examples — alongside discussions about display, conditions of care, and repatriation. It also documents the productive tension between scientific data (DNA, CT scans) and ancestral knowledge, crystallised in Yadira Iza Lequi’s question: “Whose reality?”

Responding to Jefferson Pullaguari Acacho’s call for Shuar to tell their own stories and to create documentation for future researchers, the film demonstrates how collaborative review can reshape collections knowledge, conservation practice, and institutional responsibility.

Managing Disagreement: Risk, Empire, and the Limits of “Multiple Perspectives” at the Imperial War Museums

Sofia Cotrona — Imperial War Museums

“Multiple perspectives” has become a dominant idiom of collaborative museum practices. This paper asks how national museums negotiate interpretative approaches and institutional risk when presenting diverse experiences of conflict. It focuses on Imperial War Museums (IWM), a national organisation that positions itself as a social history institution telling “everyone’s experience” of war, yet whose mandate and very name signal an unresolved relationship to Britain’s imperial past.

Examining the collaborative exhibitions *Emergency Exit* and *India’s War* alongside IWM’s permanent Second World War galleries; I show how conflict is essential for participatory practices to equally redistribute power (Lynch, 2014), yet limited by interpretative decisions shaped by risk aversion, and funding pressures. In these exhibitions, collaboration was structured by audience research and diversification targets. They enabled participation where it aligned with institutional growth strategies, but restricted participants’ agency that troubled the epistemic hierarchy of IWM, and threatened reputational or commercial value. These projects made space for marginalised and diasporic perspectives shaped by empire and racialisation, but also exposed the limits of inclusion in national museums.

Drawing on Stuart Hall’s concept of “segregated visibility,” I show how multiple perspectives are present yet policed through interpretative framing. Collaboration risks producing what Anna Sexton terms “reinforced subjugation,” as counter-hegemonic narratives are absorbed and made safe by institutional imaginaries. By foregrounding conflict rather than consensus, this paper reframes collaboration at IWM as a site where empire is not undone but negotiated under constraint. “Multiple perspectives” functions as a regulatory strategy that absorbs dissent while preserving narrative authority.

Between Access and Exclusion: Digital Platforms and the Tensions of Equitable Collaboration in Brazilian Art Museums



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Priscila Maria de Jesus — Federal University of Pernambuco
Sandra de Albuquerque Siebra — Federal University of Pernambuco
Milena Dobрева — University of Strathclyde

Equitable collaboration has not been a central focus within the discourse of Brazilian art museums or traditional museums, where narratives are typically created for specialists - unlike social initiatives such as ecomuseums. The accelerated digitalization during the COVID-19 pandemic introduced new forms of engagement in museums that go beyond improving access to collections. In this regard, online environments have been perceived as tools for democratizing access, expanding dialogue, and fostering new relationships between institutions and communities. However, in the Brazilian context, the specific forms of collaboration enabled by digital platforms - and the structural constraints they reproduce - remain underexamined.

In this context, collaboration is framed and organized through digital platforms in Brazilian art museums. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative analysis of national museum records and digital infrastructure initiatives (such as Tainacan and Brasiliana) with a qualitative investigation of institutional websites and social media practices across 479 art museums.

The findings indicate that digital platforms often extend institutional authority rather than revisiting and restructuring collaborative dynamics. Standardized documentation systems, uneven infrastructural capacity, and platform governance models shape who becomes visible, who speaks, and under what conditions participation is recognized.

By exploring digital infrastructures through an ethnography of collaboration, we argue that the lack of digital infrastructure is not merely a technical limitation but a form of exclusion that reproduces colonial and institutional asymmetries, while simultaneously revealing openings for resistance and the reimagining of museum–visitor relationships.

Panel 4

Before the Door Opens: Relationship Building, Positionality and the Pre-Collaborative Landscape of Bangladeshi Engagement at the Museum of the Home

Neela Khan — The Open University; Museum of the Home

This paper examines the precollaborative conditions shaping my Collaborative Doctoral Partnership with the Museum of the Home (MotH), showing how the university–museum partnership, through access, timelines, and institutional expectations, conditions early engagement with Bangladeshi households in East London. In recent years, the MotH has taken steps to broaden its relevance and work with diverse community groups, yet engagement with some long-established communities remains limited; for many ethnic minority residents, including Bangladeshi households, museums are still perceived as distant, extractive, or unreflective of lived realities.

The PhD therefore foregrounds relationshipbuilding rather than immediate coproduction, creating opportunities for Bangladeshis to encounter the museum on their own terms and for the institution to learn how it is perceived. As a Bangladeshi researcher I occupy a complex positionality: cultural proximity can facilitate trust, yet it also raises questions about neutrality, representation, and the emotional labour of mediating between institution and community. These dynamics are shaped by institutional histories, community perceptions, and the positional expectations placed on embedded researchers. Analysing collaboration at this early stage demonstrates that institutional efforts to diversify programming, while



meaningful, do not automatically overcome deeper structural and relational barriers. The precollaborative phase therefore reveals the limits and effects of collaboration, highlighting the ethical, representational, and practical, that researchers and institutions must acknowledge if engagement with diasporic communities is to be accountable and sustainable.

Collaboration, Co-Creation and a Culture of Care

Sarah-Jane Harknett — Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge

How can co-curation create a more accessible environment for both audiences and staff? Can changing museum processes support communities while also considering the needs of museum professionals?

From 2024-25, the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (University of Cambridge) was a pilot venue for The Sensational Museum: ‘a research project radically rethinking the role of senses in museums’ (<https://sensationalmuseum.org/>). We tested methods of adding sensory information about artefacts to collections management systems, as well as developing a truly accessible gallery intervention. This display was co-curated with a group of people who self-identified as disabled, D/deaf, and/or neurodivergent.

The entire process was transformative for the museum, during and beyond the project timeline. While acknowledging the needs of our audiences, The Sensational Museum gave staff the language and confidence to express their own requirements.

This case study will explore the practical ways that The Sensational Museum interpretation and collections toolkits can be put into practice, and how new ways of thinking can support staff to make changes that support their own wellbeing alongside collaborative work. While acknowledging the challenges of co-creation, and exploring the concept of sensory gain, I will show that working in a multi-sensory way can improve working practices, ultimately making our spaces more accessible for all, including staff.

Cultural Repatriation as an Affective Practice

Madalyn Grant — University of Cambridge

Repatriation is most often approached through ethical, legal, or procedural frameworks, with emotion treated as an accompanying response rather than a shaping dimension of the process itself. This paper proposes a different analytical orientation by conceptualising repatriation as an “affective practice”, drawing on Margaret Wetherell’s account of affect as socially patterned, historically situated, and made consequential through practice.

Focusing on contemporary museum provenance and repatriation work and collaborations with descendant communities, the paper explores how affective orientations—including trust, care, collaboration, and obligation—shape how repatriation processes are initiated, negotiated, and sustained.

Attending to repatriation as an affective practice does not replace ethical or procedural analysis; rather, it complements these approaches by clarifying how repatriation is lived, navigated, and made meaningful in practice by the people involved.



By foregrounding the affective conditions through which repatriation unfolds, the talk offers a framework for understanding why emotion remains central to repatriation even where ethical agreement exists, and how affect helps sustain or transform relationships between museums and communities.

How Can We Move Beyond Discussing Ontological Difference to Enabling It Through Flexible and Changeable Structures?

Eve Barlow — Independent Researcher

Just as there is no distinction between art and artefact in te ao Māori, it follows that there is no distinction between making and understanding ways of being. So 'how art differs' [from Anthropology] is actually of no concern to me (except that they are entrenched categories that I want to overcome). Polynesian academics/practitioners have noted this before, and in my application I cite Kahanu and Borrell (there are of course others), I'm particularly fond of Noelle Kahanu's term 'undisciplining'. I'm presenting a collaborative opportunity to enable a relational, Polynesian way of being to be engaged with in undertaking this project, and a means by which to progress towards a polyphonic Academy. I don't want to do this in a 'blamey' way, and would never claim that important contributions can't be made by anyone that adheres to distinct categories, but to be continuously penalised for being relational is very problematic. I am not suggesting this has been done purposefully, but it has been done structurally. The difficulties I've had housing this project are testimony to this, and these past three plus years have been research unto themselves.

Contributor Biographies

Adeyi Adeyemi Jonathan

Adeyi, Adeyemi Jonathan is a conservator based in National Museum Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria with collections of both Archaeological and ethnographical materials. Some of his work focuses on museum-community relationships, heritage interpretation, and collaborative practice in Nigeria which critically examines how museums negotiate authority, disagreement, and equity in collaborative contexts.

Alice Nogueira Alves

Alice Nogueira Alves is a conservator-restorer whose research focuses on theoretical issues related to the History and Theory of Conservation-Restoration. She is a PhD in Art, Heritage and Conservation-Restoration at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon and is currently an Invited Assistant Professor at its Faculty of Fine Arts.

Eve Barlow

Eve Barlow is Māori (Kai Tahu, Tainui), from a multicultural background and is a dual citizen (Aotearoa New Zealand/United Kingdom). Eve has worked as a generalist in the arts and humanities for over twenty years. Eve is a trained actor, multidisciplinary artist and researcher.

Cuerpos del Tiempo Project Team (National Museums Liverpool and LUMA Creations)

Cuerpos del Tiempo is a project that allowed the National Museums Liverpool's Global Cultures team to



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partner equitably with LUMA Creations to develop relationships with the largest, Latin American community in the UK outside of London. The speakers are: Francisco Carrasco, Creative Director/CEO, and P Max Alder, Operational Director – LUMA Creations; Meghan Backhouse, Lead Curator, and Alex Blakeborough, Assistant Curator – Global Cultures, World Museum, National Museums Liverpool.

Salvador Brown

Salvador Brown, born in Aotearoa with Samoan, and European bloodlines, was raised among Moananui (Pacific) cultures in Aotearoa NZ and London. Current President of the SaVĀge K'lub. His art reawakens ancestral Moananui stories through moving image and the making and playing of traditional musical instruments of the region. @salvadorbrown

Shuar Tsantsa Project Team

This presentation arises from a collaborative project between Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), Shuar federations, Pitt Rivers Museum, Wellcome Collection, the British Museum, and Science Museum Group. Nicholas Crowe will speak alongside another colleague (tbc) on behalf of the wider team. A film ensures the self-representation of Shuar delegates Yadira Iza Lequi; Sandro Yu Mukuimp; Santiago Utitaj Paati; Jefferon Pullaguari Acacho; Karina Nanchi Tsukanka; Toa Antunish Medina, alongside USFQ project lead María Patricia Ordóñez and Professor Consuelo Fernández.

Olly DeHerrera

Olly DeHerrera is a graduate of Oxford's MSc in Visual, Material, and Museum Anthropology. As a member of the Northern Ute Tribe, they have researched in both an academic and traditional setting in the American Southwest. Their interests are in Indigenous methodologies, decolonial provenance research and object advocacy.

Daniel Espinoza López

Daniel Espinoza López is an Indigenous Chontal from the community of San Pedro Huamelula, Oaxaca, Mexico. He was appointed in 2024 as the Secretary of the Community Museum Committee. Daniel is a Law student and a business owner, and further works in Huamelula's radio station.

Fernanda Quadros de Azevedo Costa

Fernanda Quadros is a researcher at the University of Lisbon's Research and Studies Center in Fine Arts (CIEBA), with a Master's degree in Museology and Museography. Her research engages cultural heritage and critical theory, with a focus on socially inclusive exhibition practices and colonial heritage narratives.

Madalyn Grant

Madalyn Grant is a PhD candidate and Gates Scholar at the University of Cambridge researching the racialisation of emotions in repatriation. She previously served as Repatriation Manager at the University of



Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. Her research examines repatriation processes, affect studies, and the histories and legacies of archaeological practice.

Medardo Gutiérrez García

Medardo Gutiérrez García is an Indigenous Chontal from the community of San Pedro Huamelula, Oaxaca, Mexico. He was appointed in 2024 as the Head of the Community Museum Committee. Medardo is also an accomplished mask-maker, carpenter, and orator.

Sarah-Jane Harknett

Sarah-Jane Harknett is the Head of Public Engagement and Learning at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, where she manages the team that develops and expands the museum's work with visitors and audiences. Her research is focussed on improving evaluation to demonstrate the impact of museums.

Eve Haddow

Eve is Senior Curator in Anthropology at MAA, responsible for the care of Pacific Islands, Australia, and Americas collections. Her research focuses on western Pacific material culture, missionary collecting, and material connected with plantation histories in the Pacific and Australia.

Jan Hüsgen

Dr. Jan Hüsgen is Head of the Department for Cultural Goods and Collections at the German Lost Art Foundation. Together with his colleagues, he has established a funding program for provenance research in colonial contexts in Germany. To date, the foundation has supported approximately 100 projects with a total funding volume of €15 million.

Jan has a particular interest in fostering international cooperation within publicly funded research programs. Trained as a historian, he has conducted research in the Americas and West Africa. Prior to joining the German Lost Art Foundation, he worked on several research projects focusing on colonial history. He has held fellowships from the German Research Foundation (DFG) as well as from the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, and the German Historical Institute Paris.

Neela Khan

Neela Khan is a doctoral researcher at The Open University, funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Her research examines multigenerational living and the ways families share, shape, and experience home across generations. She works in partnership with the Museum of the Home, contributing to community-focused research and public engagement on contemporary home life. Alongside her academic work, she also works closely with girls in her community, supporting and empowering them in their educational and career ambitions. Before beginning her doctorate, Neela built an extensive career in the policy sector, using research to address a broad spectrum of social issues related to discrimination in order to inform evidence-based decision-making.



Rosalia Méndez Petriz

Rosalia Méndez Petriz is an Indigenous Chontal from the community of San Pedro Huamelula, Oaxaca, Mexico. She was appointed in 2024 as the Treasurer of the Community Museum Committee. As a long-time educator, Rosalia is also a teacher in the local schools in Huamelula.

Rosanna Raymond

Rosanna is a leading contemporary Moananui artist, writer, and performer. Founding SaVĀge K'lub and member of Pacific Sisters, arts collectives her work spans curation, critique, and adornment. Raymond was awarded CNZ Pacific Senior Artist and appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for Pacific Arts.

@rosannaraymond

Sandra de Albuquerque Siebra

Sandra de Albuquerque Siebra. PhD in Computer Science. Professor in the Department of Information Science and the Graduate Program in Information Science at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE) - Brazil. Researcher at the Liber Laboratory-UFPE, focusing on Digital Curation, Digital Preservation, Usability, and User Experience.

Santiago Valencia Parra

Santiago Valencia Parra is a curator with a research interest in the cultural landscapes of the Global South. As Digital Curator for SDCELAR, he gained experience in collection-based projects through collaborations with researchers, Indigenous communities, and artists. He currently collaborates with ESCALA at the University of Essex, where he teaches art history.

Sofia Cotrona

Sofia Cotrona is a London-based curator, art historian, and cultural policy researcher. An AHRC-funded PhD candidate at IWM and UCA, she explores participatory methodologies, memory studies, and cultural democracy through feminist and decolonial lens of care, and participation. She has curated international exhibitions and worked in youth cultural policy and diplomacy.

Danny Zborover

Danny Zborover is Head of the Americas Section and Director of SDCELAR at the British Museum. He collaborates with descendent communities in Latin America in the co-creation of community museums and the preservation of cultural heritage, and has been working in the Chontal region in southern Mexico since 2000.

Heba Abd el Gawad

Heba Abd el Gawad is Senior Curator of Anthropology at the Horniman Museum and Gardens. Her work is committed to community-led museum practice, developing partnerships that reimagine futures for colonially



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extracted ancestral remains and cultural belongings through Indigenous sovereignty and knowledge systems. In 2021, she was recognised among the 21 most influential Egyptian women for her heritage-sector impact.

Johanna Zetterström-Sharp

Johanna Zetterström-Sharp is Associate Professor in Heritage and Museum Studies at the UCL Institute of Archaeology. Prior to this, she was Senior Curator of Anthropology at the Horniman Museum in South London (2012-2022), and Lecturer in Anthropology at Goldsmiths (2019-2022). Her research focuses on disciplinary knowledge production, and how issues of ethics, race, entitlement and inequality become structurally embedded through the establishment of professional expertise and practice across a range of fields. Her forthcoming book with UCL Press explores the limits of good intentions as UK museum ethnographers navigated a series of disciplinary and ethical crises between the 1970s and early 1990s, and the legacies of this today.

Priscila Maria de Jesus

Priscila Maria de Jesus is a PhD Student at the Federal University of Pernambuco (Brazil) and a Visiting Student at the University of Strathclyde, funded by CAPES (Brazil). She is also a Professor at the Federal University of Sergipe (Brazil). Her research compares digital collections and communications in art museums in Brazil and Scotland.

Milena Dobрева

Milena Dobрева, Senior Lecturer at the University of Strathclyde. Her research focuses on digital cultural heritage, and participatory approaches in GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, museums). She also works on the decolonisation of heritage, exploring how digital infrastructures, open science, and emerging technologies can support more inclusive access, engagement, and reuse.

