

## New Museum School Podcast Transcript– 2019/2020

**PODCAST TITLE:** *Let's Talk Tokenism*

**NMS TRAINEE:** *Tabitha Deadman*

**HOST INSTITUTION:** *Keats House*

### SCRIPT

#### **NMS INTRO STING**

#### **INTERVIEW CLIP 1 | Interview with Dean Atta**

“When I was at school, we had Section 28 and teachers couldn’t talk about LGBT because it was considered talking about pretend families and relationships that weren’t considered real or moral.”

#### **INTERVIEW CLIP 2 | Interview with Dean Atta**

“It’s not long since we had the Equality Act of 2010, and so prior to then we weren’t actually specifically protected for being LGBT or a woman or disabled or pregnant.”

#### **LINK 1**

I’m Tabitha Deadman, trainee at Keats House, and you’re listening to ‘*Lets’ Talk Tokenism*’, my New Museum School podcast.

LGBT history month in the UK was started in February 2005 by Schools Out UK. The aim was to focus on school engagement with LGBT representation, but it has grown beyond the educational sector and become an annual celebration for many museums, galleries and archives.

## LINK 2

Why do we need a month to celebrate queer history, I hear you cry? In 2017, Stonewall found that one in five LGBT people had experienced hate crime in the past 12 months. In 2018, LGBT organisation GLAAD found out of 109 films released by major studios, only 20 films contained characters identified as LGBTQ. There is a real lack of representation and equality. We need LGBT history month to make ourselves visible. As Sue Sanders, founder of LGBT History Month, says, we need to *“claim our past, celebrate our present, and create our future”*.

## LINK 3

As a museum visitor, I have always been excited by LGBT history month. I find the whole LGBT takeover quite empowering: there are more events catering to my interests; I can meet like-minded people in a safe and inclusive space; and I have the opportunity to learn more about my own history. But in recent years, as someone who has been involved in a range of LGBT heritage projects and now works within a museum, the charm is slowly fading - we're only being allocated a 28-day slot in a yearly program.

Diversity is the current buzzword in the cultural sector. For museums, it's not just about the people you employ, but also about the collection and the stories you choose to share. We need to ensure diversity is not just a token gesture. The aim of LGBT history month is to shed light on history that's been erased, but it doesn't really count when you ignore it for the other 11 months.

## LINK 4

I asked **Dean Atta**, Poet-in-Residence at Keats House from February to April this year, and **Claire Mead**, curator and queer museum activist, what they thought about LGBT history month. Here's **Dean Atta**:

## INTERVIEW CLIP 3 | Interview with Dean Atta

“At first, I got a lot of work in October and February, LGBT history month and Black History month, but then the rest of the year I wasn’t getting much. And that felt really tokenistic, I guess, of those institutions to only want to work with me in those months where I guess their budgets or their priorities are focused on certain issues. But the rest of the year they didn’t think about them or put any resources into them - that’s schools, that’s museums and galleries, that’s all sorts of institutions that I’m talking about there.

But now, I don’t know if it’s different because of my profile, I’m getting work all year round and I don’t feel like marginalised into those months. But I’m sure there’s many people that do feel like that. So I kind of subtly and not so subtly whenever I do work in LGBT history month, I do say “Do have me back, another time, not just in February” and I’ll say it again in the email, when I send my invoice I’m like “Happy to come back any other time of year as well.” *(Laughs)* Just so that I’m making a point of it because I think you don’t just tick a box – it’s got to be embedded as well.

But I think having a month is better than not having a month. At the moment I think it’s important to give people a focus and give these organisations and the LGBT people that work within those organisations the support to encourage activity within that month. Because if it’s not going to happen any other time, it means at least they can champion it in February and then hopefully it does slowly embed. But I think it must be hard, say, to be a LGBT teacher or employee in an organisation and not know how to broach these things in terms of diversity and inclusion and LGBT things you want to see happen in the organisation. And so if you’ve got February and you’ve got websites with resources on and you’ve got people that are going to come in and do talks or presentations or workshops, then that’s really exciting. And I think that’s good and hopefully will be remembered in the year.”

## LINK 5

It feels as if some institutions are really taking for granted LGBT creatives and their abilities – as if people brought in for work in February are seen purely through their LGBT identity. Then museums and galleries use this tokenism to claim to be diverse.

But LGBT history month could be used to highlight a year-long program of queer history. Curator and queer museum activist, **Claire Mead**:

### INTERVIEW CLIP 4 | Interview with Claire Mead

“LGBT history month is great when it can amplify the work that we’re already doing within the sector, but every single person who’s actively working within queer activism and heritage in the UK knows that that always extends far beyond February. But I think it’s also up to museums to recognise that - that that work is all year round, that you can’t just cram all your events into February and June, and that you have very valuable insights on queerness that happen all year round.”

### INTERVIEW CLIP 5 | Interview with Claire Mead

“Well, a good example is the V&A. Dan Vo has been implementing LGBTQ tours at the V&A which have become monthly and are always a sell-out success for years now. It’s not a one-time thing during Pride month; it’s an ongoing queering process, which is also supported by an LGBTQ research group. But sometimes when you see something that just pops out as a temporary event and then you don’t really hear about the direct consequences and the long-term relationship that’s being built with the community, you have to wonder about how effective that actually is. So - no rainbow band-aids. More of a long-term process of talking with people, creating long term collaborations.”

## LINK 6

Tokenism can be a result of unequal power. Are you a straight ally in a museum listening to this? Step up and help your LGBT colleagues. Organise events, demand more queer exhibitions or stories from your collection. If you're an LGBT staff member working in a museum, it can be intimidating and exhausting to make a fuss, when you already feel out of place at work. Why not create a platform for LGBT creatives to showcase their work - without them having to do all the prep and planning themselves? Dean and Claire both spoke to me about the different ways allies can help with LGBT history month. **Claire Mead** again:

### INTERVIEW CLIP 6 | Interview with Claire Mead

"I think agency is really important in terms of discussing what is tokenistic or not. Queer activists, queer people working in heritage, which are at the heart of LGBT history month and are paving the way, is not tokenistic. But I feel that the issue is more in terms of the fact that it needs to happen all year round. I think that tokenism checks in when a museum or institution will only have an LGBTQ-related event in February. You're just wondering what's going on there; what's the story.

I think so many people, individuals are working towards increasing visibility for LGBT history throughout this month, but it's up to institutions who have the power and the facilities to enable these conversations to also happen all year round. So, museums – get to it, please!" *(Laughter)*

## LINK 7

With several queer museums emerging now, maybe soon LGBT heritage will have its own museum as well as a month. But this isn't an excuse for institutions to continue to ignore the LGBT history within their collections. It's so important to acknowledge LGBT history in society today, but we are given the shortest month of the year to celebrate centuries of existence. Hopefully, at some point in the future, queer history will be normalised and included in exhibitions and events' programmes all year round.

I'll leave the last word to **Dean Atta**:

## INTERVIEW CLIP 7 | Interview with Dean Atta

"There's so many things that have changed in the past decade. So, I think maybe in 2030 we can review it *{laughter}* and say do we still need LGBT history month? But I think right now, in 2020, we still do."

**NMS OUTRO STING**

**END OF SCRIPT**