WHOSE HERITAGE?
RESEARCH RESIDENCY PROGRAMME

A Culture& programme offering residencies to new diverse arts professionals at leading arts and heritage organisations.

January 2021 – November 2021
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface Whose Heritage?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Shakespeare</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Open Call</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qanitah Malik</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘Unless the younger generation has access to...cultural repertoires and can understand and practice them, to some extent at least, from the inside, they will lack the resources – the cultural capital – of their own 'heritage', as a base from which to engage other traditions.’

Stuart Hall (1999) 'Whose heritage? un-settling 'The Heritage', re-imagining the Post-nation’ Third Text 49: 3-13,
PREFACE: WHOSE HERITAGE?

THE OPEN CALL

Sandra

Whose Heritage? Residencies were undertaken by New Museum School graduates at the following National Trust sites: Sutton House, 575 Wandsworth Road in London, Runnymede & Ankwerwyke and Clandon Park in Surrey. Online organisations Art UK and the Collections Trust and Milton’s Cottage Museum in Buckinghamshire. Researchers brought diverse perspectives to specific areas of research at each organisation. Each researcher was mentored by curatorial, research, or interpretation staff in their quest to reveal new narratives behind objects and sites to connect meaningfully with diverse audiences - those communities who might not feel the collections or sites are ‘for them’.

INTERSECTONALITY
DECOLONISATION
ACTIVISM

Residencies allowed researchers creative opportunities for the interrogation language and terminology, traditionally used when classifying or describing objects. The reports capture this tension with contemporary forms of decolonisation practice to challenge accepted institutional practice. For example: Sutton House’s intangible history linked to ‘squatter activism’ explored local communities and new insights conveyed through archives, protest banners and posters through a digital zine. This ezine also speaks to Gen Z, the accessibility and consumption of heritage through online digital media expressed through non-conformist DIY art forms

Or with Art UK and research into Bi-visibility: the importance of bisexual+ representation in UK art collections. At 575 Wandsworth Road research and re-interpretation of the times and life of the owner Khadambi Asalache will help enhance and understand how BAME visitors experience tophilia at this site. Whose Heritage? Residencies:

- Revealed new narratives behind objects, collections, sites, and monuments in ways that connect meaningfully with diverse audiences
- Brought new research and interpretation to heritage assets
- Illustrated the value of a diverse workforce
- Supported the careers of graduates through an outcome driven residency with leading heritage organisations
- Shared knowledge with the wider sector with work and outcomes on a new online platform this provides the context for the broader debate of diversity issues across the arts and heritage sector.
QANITAH MALIK

Collections Trust

Qanitah was based with the National Trust Creative Team, she helped to carry out exciting projects in London that highlighted special places and sites, centring in on heritage, wellbeing and culture, through public programmes, research, providing digital media support, and audience engagement.

Born in Lahore, Pakistan, Qanitah moved to the USA to pursue her undergraduate degree at Mount Holyoke College, where she majored in Fine Art and minored in Anthropology. After graduating, she moved to London and has worked with several different art and cultural organisations to promote, preserve and re-think what culture and heritage entails in the 21st century. At the same time, she also works on developing her art practice in illustration and helps curate and organise exhibitions with a group of artists in London. Connecting to a deeper, more aware self, and interacting with other artists to build community is what keeps bringing her back to her practice.

She was thoroughly excited to be a New Museum School Trainee, to get to know more creatives, develop old and new skills, and to think critically about heritage and culture – how to weave under-represented narratives into the social fabric of a cosmopolitan and transient city like London.
Blurring Field-Box Boundary
Documenting through Community Participation

This project is my participation in conversations on “decolonising” documentation practices in museums. I offer recommendations and ethical questions for Collections Trust (CT) using learnings from case-studies that focus on ethical community collaboration and highlight how CT can support museums/collections to achieve such engagement. The case studies I have chosen demonstrate how problematics of language, missing content, and misrepresentation of cultural semantics can be addressed through collaborative, respectful and sustained engagement with stakeholders.

I conducted my research March–June 2021, during which I conducted open-ended structured interviews with representatives from my case studies, [Re:]entanglements, Horniman Museums’s Rethinking Relationships, Black Artists and Modernisms Project, Time and Tide Collection, Culture Terminology Network and Homosaurus. Additionally, I visited the South Asia Collection (SAC), in Norwich and textually analysed their publicly accessible materials. My case studies were chosen through desk-top research and snowball sampling.

What can the Collections Trust (CT) offer for Museums?

Acknowledge institutional history

One of the persistent concerns with object acquisition is meticulously tracing its travels and documentation, in addition to understanding biases of the collector, as this influences the documentation and representation of records and narratives formed (Turner 2016). Thorough documentation and publication (on website and social media) of collector biases and object travels can be made more transparent in order to build trust with the public and communities involved. During fieldwork, I sensed ambivalence among sector practitioners regarding transparency and regular evaluation of documentation guidelines, which can be rectified through documentation and publication (on website and social media) of organizational history and documentation policies. CT can play a role by highlighting podcasts and forums, and make museum professionals more aware of the effects of their practices of collecting and classifying information on engagement, access, and ultimately, the kind of values the museum is upholding for its audiences. (I provide examples below: Fig 1.4 and 1.5)

During interview, Hannah Bentley, ex- Collections Documentation Manager – SAC, related that she was responsible for revising documentation policy every two years, and fact-checking object histories. (This involved referring to paper records, interviews with donors, auction house catalogues, and travel information from Millwards). From decolonial perspectives, equal concern can be administered to contextual details of object biographies. Enhancing object-descriptions through multiple sources is highlighted through the work of [Re:]entanglements, a project led by Paul Basu in collaboration with researchers and community. (Available at https://re-entanglements.net/ (Accessed: July 12, 2021). Their work on ‘decolonising’ Northcote Thomas’s ethnographic archive produced the challenge of...
documenting complex information and plurality of meaning. (The archive is dispersed over University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the British Library Sound Archive, the Pitt Rivers Museum, the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the UK National Archives). Two points emerged from interview with Basu: dispel the myth of neat methods – improvising, building relationships and developing a complex network of stakeholders is key as there is in no single source community; and be genuine, sensitive, common-sensical to circumvent co-optation of information and extractive relationships.

In line with Basu’s reflections, SAC has conducted external research on specific collections, which apparently has been built back in the database. Collections can acknowledge multiple descendant groups and communities that go beyond the object, and explore multi-layered stories to acknowledge the spiritual, cultural, historical and in/tangible value prescribed to collections, which must then be incorporated into documentation practice and procedures. This is also something that CT can push museums to do more thoroughly on the database.
The full name can be a series of keywords and details, which may conform to one or more of the following:

- the main material of the object
- the 'style' of the object
- the period of the object
- the function of the object
- the maker of the object
- the place where the object was produced.

NOTES

The final section of the card is for any notes about the object. They are technically detail. Because of this you may use your detail separator as data in this section if you wish.

These notes may include data which is unsuitable for analysis, important data which does not fit into any section of the card, and an outline description of the object suitable for use as a caption.

In the case of data which you do not wish to analyse, simply record it as a block of information. This will not be easily useable as an index entry, but may provide further background information about the object, or be useful as a short label or abstract. When records are computerised the notes can be useful sources of information. They will be most useable if in the form of short sentences rather than discursive essays.

---

Fig 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 Museum Documentation Association (now Collections Trust) - Catalogue Card Instruction Manuals

Note: In Fig 1.3, third paragraph – classification hierarchy established and biases of cataloguer mainatined, 'In the case of data which you do not wish to analyse.'
Document more thoroughly

Publicly accessible material, can be generalized and vague, assuming certain ‘epistemic totality’ (Mignolo and Walsh, in Crilly 2019), with reductive classification systems. Museums have addressed language issues by working with universities. For instance, Horniman’s Rethinking Relationships addresses issues of misrepresentation, outdated information, and lacking collection provenance, linking them to key moments in the history of the collection through workshops with stakeholders. (Available at https://www.horniman.ac.uk/story/rethinking-relationships-kenyan-community-research/ Accessed: July 12, 2021). They have built sustained relationships with both researchers and community. This involved guiding researchers to carry out their own provenance research, and providing community members resources and tools to digitally access collections and input their responses on the future of collections. Guidance and information was provided about the history, nature and conduct of museum collecting, how terminology and context may be outdated, incorrect, offensive or inappropriate (for example under recognition of a breadth of cultural groups within a community or overlapping people in various cultural groups). During the interview with JC Niala, project lead researcher, we talked about symmetric respect and care for community and western approaches to archival collections, and conditions under which knowledge can be legally and ethically preserved, published and changed over time. Acknowledging and seeking advice from communities on language/terminology, we can be more sensitive in documentation and representation.

During this project, I realised the inextricable link between language and classification, which informs the arrangement, categorisation, and object-descriptions in paper records, and their lingering shadow on documentation trail (Turner 2016). (Due to limitations of time and scope, I could not fully explore this aspect during this project.) Despite Modes and its afforded flexibility, the CRM may retain classification hierarchy paper documentation (Ben Cartwright, Collection Curator – SAC, interview). (Modes Compact is designed for smaller museums and supports the Spectrum Primary Procedures required by the Accreditation scheme to collate, manage and share collection information). CT can extend its on-going work on developing Spectrum to support non-Western languages/scripts. (One of my immersive experiences during this project was meetings with Gordon McKenna, Standards Manager, where I learned about Spectrum. Now in its fifth edition, Spectrum was first published in 1994 as a guide for best practice in collections management. Sarah Brown, Events and Outreach Officer, conducts monthly meetings to support professionals to document per Spectrum standards. Documentation systems have storage limitations, and I learned during fieldwork of issues confronting cataloguers digitising information from card catalogues, for which support is provided. A question for me then is how we can use Spectrum to think about gaps in collections). Layering object names/associations, and seeking advice from communities on language/terminology, we can be more sensitive in documentation and representation.

The symmetry stressed by Niala is tilted, for instance in Bentley’s mention of uneasy transliteration of Sanskrit words in Modes. Similarly, by layering pre- and post-Partition object names/associations from the sub-continent, museums can time-mark object travels, which would reflect regional variations across South Asia. Acknowledging and seeking advice from communities on language/terminology, we can be more sensitive in documentation and representation.

CT facilitates inventory completion through Spectrum working groups and ‘Banish the Backlog.’ (Refer to guidelines outlined by CT: https://collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum/primary-procedures/) It must be recognized that ‘documentation is not at odds with access’ (Lawther 2020). I have pointed out case-studies that prioritise both, and it will enhance their work if CT develops tools and protocols so that engagement and research are plugged back into the database. Multi-channel information flow presents documentation and retrieval issues. CT is holding a conference later this year.
on documenting complex information, which may consider the following: a) non-reductive classification models, b) a phased and/or case-by-case consideration of customised protocols for cataloguing, c) training/resources to incorporate ‘unstructured’ data into structured database-system, and d) including multiple perspectives in documentation. (Collections management databases are one way of documenting and recording information, and it would be interesting to explore other non-hierarchical, non-Anglicised, less control heavy, more collaborative ways. Do we need to link all of this information on one platform?)

In Museum catalogues where objects are described through their physical and skill/craft attributes, they can be divorced from their lived spirit and history (case-studies interviews). Inspiration can be drawn from Black Artists and Modernisms Project, ‘which seeks to forget the artistic object in favour of questioning how BAME artists feature in twentieth-century art narratives and documentation.’ (Available at Black Artists & Modernism (blackartistsmodernism.co.uk) Accessed: July 13, 2021.

For collection catalogues that risk aestheticising cultural and religious sensitive material, and repackaging without contextual information, museums can follow the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology’s approach, which acknowledges inaccurate, out-of-date and inappropriate descriptions/representations, and invites public emails for their identification. CT can promote museums to then input this information onto their museum databases. (Available at https://maa.cam.ac.uk/ Accessed: July 12, 2021).

Co-creation of solutions

Partnering with universities can enrich user access, and benefit small collections like SAC, which have limited resources and project timescales. CT can help by sharing examples, such as the Museum–University Partnership Initiative, which provides models, resources and tools to expedite this. (Organised between 2016 and 2019, the Museum–University Partnership Initiative (MUPI) created connections between museums and university partners to provide tools to support museum-university partnerships and share learning from the project. More information can be found at: https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/nccpe-projects-and-services/completed-projects/museum-university-partnership-initiative).

In February 2021, CT conducted roundtables for museum professionals to discuss issues of documenting and cataloguing collections, and can broaden this effort by showcasing documentation resources co-created by industry professionals (Figure 1.4). It can also create more collaborative online platforms, for instance, on the subject of term-lists and glossaries (Figure 1.5).
Culture Terminology Network

Informs standards of description for protected characteristics.

Historical context of discriminatory/preferred terminology relating to Race, Gender and Sexuality, Disability, Religion, and Class.

Great place to discuss the future development of this Terminology Glossary as a resource that would be of use to the entire cultural heritage sector.

Carissa Chew
Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion intern

Referred by:
Jade King, Lead Editor, of Art UK (1:1 Interview)

Fig 1.4 Card-catalogue 1

Homosaurus

An international linked data vocabulary of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) terms.

Broad subject term vocabularies, such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings.

Libraries, archives, museums, and other institutions are encouraged to use the Homosaurus to support LGBTQ research by enhancing the discoverability of their LGBTQ resources.

Referred by:
Sarah Brown, Outreach Manager, Collections Trust (1:1 Interview)

Fig 1.5 Card-catalogue 2
Addressing inappropriate/outdated content

I learned through Gerry Hey, Head Collections Management Systems - Natural History Museum, that their ‘audit week’ allows curators to address ‘accuracy and update critical aspects of collections,’ and CT scan advocate similar approaches to other museums. Acknowledging problematic words, language and preferred terms, flagging content, updating and ensuring transparency of documentation policies is crucial (Rutherford 2021), and should be a regular practice promoted by CT. During interview, Wayne Kett, Curator Great Yarmouth Museums, outlined how he removed problematic language from Time and Tide Collection, and created a terminology database. In my view, it is essential to advocate updating term-lists while retaining the object-record’s trace on documentation system.

Spaces of engagement

Museums can enrich their documentation practices by giving same importance and resources to collections that have historically been excluded from the great list of valuables.

I learned from Cartwright that building relationships and networks has been fundamental to research, especially for ‘Vernacular Furniture of Rajasthan.’ Maintaining these relationships post-project is key.

To engage in broad-based ethics of co-creation, CT can encourage museums to acknowledge multiple descendant groups, and outline ethical guidelines for collaborations. This goes hand-in-hand with honouring a community’s right to access, developing ‘radicalness of empathy’ (Christen and Anderson 2019) and fostering voluntary, non-coercive relationships. (Good examples of such practices include Making African Connections Project (2021) and Protocols for Native American Archival Materials). Further, CT can promote a values-based approach, similar to community archives, in documenting collections, augmented by a non-custodial model of stewardship whereby the community, not the museum/collection, is owner of the material. (My thinking and research have been substantiated by the documentation work carried out by underground archives and community archivists, for instance see ‘A process where we’re all at the table’: community archives challenging dominant modes of archival practice).

Some enabling steps towards this include: more “under-represented” histories be accessible online, more spaces for audiences and researchers to provide information/context around collections, and flexible approaches to documentation, for example through the addition of notes-fields, additional tagging, and linking terminology lists to the Collection Management Systems. I provide the following examples:
Fig 1.6 and 1.7 CT can regularly share examples of projects, such as *100 Histories of 100 Worlds in 1 Object* and the *Atlantic Black Box Project*, which focus on the ‘collective rewriting’ of history through ‘story, community and conversation.’ *(Available respectively at https://100histories100worlds.org/ Accessed July 14, 2021, and at Atlantic Black Box Accessed: July 13, 2021)*

### Atlantic Black Box

“Seeks to engage the public in a collective re-writing of regional history”

“Builds community through conversation”

Referred by:

Ananda Rutherford, Museum Collection Manager and Researcher

### 100 Histories of 100 Worlds in 1 Object

The project seeks:

- New methods, research approaches and formats
- To develop new object histories
- To gather new object biographies

Desk-based Research
CONCLUSION

The above case studies, Figure 1.6 and Figure 1.7, showcase how decolonial approaches must go beyond politics of representation and identity in museum collections, and consider creation of spaces so people have a say in what values are ascribed to collections. A productive approach to collection documentation is keeping an open mind in our daily practice and learning through other initiatives, projects and engagements. The museum and the archive are steeped in colonial legacy that cannot be tidied up completely. For now, we situate ourselves in their limits and re-think their possibilities as public spaces. The case-studies examined above allow for the creation of these spaces.

“...it is this very purposeful and engaged responsibility that will move the field toward a slow archives, whereby the products—be they records, metadata or finding aids—are no longer the focus of archival practices. What becomes central in slow archives is relationships with communities of origin.”

Christen and Anderson (2019)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While I must thank all those professionals in the sector who have generously offered their time and support in my interviews, my research and thinking process have been greatly influenced by the work of Ananda Rutherford and Dr. Tehmina Goskar who have consistently provided guidance and support throughout this project. Similarly, conversations with Professor Paul Basu and JC Niala have been influential and crucially grounding during the course of my research. I thank Sandra Shakespeare, Dr. Errol Francis and Kate Sarley at Culture& for their critical feedback, consideration and flexibility in accommodating my needs, and Kevin Gosling, Sarah Brown and Gordon McKenna for providing me the opportunity and support to delve into this work. All errors, of course, remain my own.

Last but never the least, Sanayah and Aina, for all their limitless care, consideration, endless pep talk, positive and motivational energy to always re-focus my perspective on the larger picture.

Thank you all.