**Making Museum Professionals Workshop 1, 23 May 2023**

**Museum Work: Hierarchies and Barriers, Exclusion and Inclusion**

Birkbeck, University of London - Keynes Library, 39-47 Gordon Square (School of Arts), Bloomsbury, London, WC1H 0PN

**Abstracts and speaker details**

Keynotes:

**Dr Errol Francis**

**Towards inclusivity and relevance in UK arts and heritage**.

Abstract:

Culture& is a black-led arts and education charity based in London. Culture& provides consultancy and research and has co-curated a number of arts programme and interpretation programmes in partnership with arts and heritage organisations in the UK.

Culture& aims to open up who makes and enjoys arts and heritage through workforce initiatives and public programmes. This presentation will give insights into Culture&'s New Museum School Advanced Programme in partnership with the University of Leicester and the Culture& X Sotheby’s Institute of Art Cultural Leaders Programme launched in March 2023.

Biography:

Dr Errol Francis is artistic director and CEO of Culture&. Errol studied photography and fine art at Central Saint Martin’s, University of the Arts London. His doctoral research at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London focused on postcolonial artistic responses to museums.

Errol works with museums on collaborative public programmes and consultancy. He also leads the New Museum School (NMS) which partners with the University of Leicester to provide studentships for people from diverse communities. NMS enables them to pursue studies in museum studies and socially engaged practice to progress their careers in the heritage sector. Errol is involved in a number of research projects and is visiting lecturer at UCL, Sotheby’s Institute of Art; Honorary Lecturer at the University of Exeter and Visiting Fellow at the University of Leicester.

**Professor Fiona Candlin**

**DIY Museums: Opportunity and Inequity**

Abstract:

The historian Raphael Samuel wrote that history is the work ‘of a thousand pairs of hands’. That comment certainly applies to the UK museums boom when thousands of groups, individuals, and businesses launched their own museums. In this paper I ask: whose hands exactly? Who founded the new museums of the late twentieth- and twenty-first centuries? Conversely, who did not? And if not, why not?

Biography:

Fiona Candlin is Professor of Museology at Birkbeck University of London. She has worked at museums and universities and has written extensively on small, independent museums, the twentieth-century museums boom, data collection in the museum sector, and sensory history. She collaborates with a team of computer and data scientists, geographers, and historians, and has a strong commitment to inter- and multi-disciplinary research. Her Mapping Museums project has led to several books and other outputs on the genesis, growth and future of the small independent museum sector.

**Louise McAward-White**

**Fair Museum Jobs: Challenge and Change in Museum Recruitment Practice**

Abstract:

Since 2017 Fair Museum Jobs has been challenging museums and the wider heritage sector to improve recruitment practice and remove the long-term traditions and barriers that keep people out of the sector and depress wages. Louise McAward-White will discuss the highs and lows of the last 6 years at Fair Museum Jobs and what change is still necessary to dismantle hierarchies and make a better sector for the current and future workforce.

Biography:

Louise McAward-White has been working in museums for over 15 years in various roles: front of house, education, events, curatorial, visitor experience and collections systems. In 2017, Louise co-founded Fair Museum Jobs; a grassroots, collective movement with the objective to establish a better standard (“The Manifesto”) for museum job recruitment that is based on the principles of fairness, transparency, equity and inclusivity. In 2020 Louise and Fair Museum Jobs were listed in blooloop's 50 museum influencers list for 2020.

Session 1 Creating and contesting professional identities

**Kirsty Kernohan, ‘An excellent guide to her own museum’: intersections of women’s knowledge and racism on a visit to the Royal Victoria Institute, Trinidad, 1897**

This presentation will discuss a nineteenth-century encounter between two women which evokes the historical intersection of gendered and racist barriers for women in museums and reflects contemporary concerns around how challenges to gendered hierarchies can perpetuate racist practices.

Sydney, Countess of Kintore (1851-1932) collected natural history specimens which she displayed in a private museum at her Aberdeenshire home. Her journals describe her search for practical knowledge about their care and display whilst emphasising her implicitly gendered insecurities about her own knowledge: she could not really be a natural historian.

The ways in which gendered barriers intersected with colonial racism are thrown into focus in Sydney’s account of her visit to the Royal Victoria Institute, Trinidad in 1897. Shown around the museum by Mrs LaTour, the museum’s administrator and a woman of colour, Sydney responds to Mrs LaTour’s knowledge with a marked increase in her own confidence. This self-assurance, I argue, is derived from Sydney’s assumption that—unlike with men—she could and should know more than Mrs LaTour.

Sydney’s account offers evidence of professional women of colour in nineteenth century museums. It also emphasises the shifting and relational qualities of professional identities as they are perceived and inhabited by people working alongside each other. In doing so, it gestures towards uncomfortable histories—and their contemporary resonances— in which marginalised people have navigated their own precarious places in museums at the expense of others.

Bio: I completed my PhD in anthropology at the University of Aberdeen in 2021, with research focusing on intergenerational family practices of colonial collecting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I also worked with Dumfries Museum on the Werner Kissling project, exploring the relationships between local communities and ethnographic photographs of Scotland. I am currently a Photographic Collections Assistant for the Roslyn and Axel Poignant project at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge.

**Hoyee Tse, Diversification and Diversity: the Employment of Asian Museum Professionals in the UK**

In my presentation, I would like to explore how art and history museums were and are limiting their employment of Asian staff to Asian-related collections and exhibitions and the front-of-house teams. I propose to look into how Asians were and are mainly hired if they specialise(d) themselves in Asian art practices and history. Although there are many British art practitioners with Asian heritage studying non-Asian art and history subjects, museums still seem to employ Asians for Asian collections and related programmes only.

Meanwhile, many European museum professionals were and are still employed to contribute and lead Asian-related museum programmes, which means that the opportunities available for the Asian workers in the sector become even more limited. I will discuss in the workshop my analysis of different reports related to the demographics of museums in the UK and present my research surveying what departments and collections Asian museum professionals worked and are working in. I will also highlight how an increase in the total number of staff members of the global majority working in the museum sector does not imply an actual diversity in museum operations. On the contrary, it may be the result of a racialisation of the museum roles.

Bio: Trained as a social art historian at UCL and University of Amsterdam, I am interested in the social role that the cultural institutions play in producing the meanings of art and cultural objects. I earned a postgraduate degree (with Distinction) at UCL Institute of Education with my dissertation focusing on contemporary museum collecting practices in relation to art, history and design collections. I received the 2022 Design Trust Curatorial Fellowship at the Royal College of Art, London, to continue my research in the field. My project is probing into the potential use of digital platforms as a community-engaged space for co-curating and localising the knowledge about contemporary design and art collections. Currently, I am working on a short-term curatorial project about the politics of cultural representations and the racial hierarchy in the UK theatres.

**Tamsin Russell, We are where we are – so what next?**

In this talk Tamsin will survey the state of the museum profession in the UK and consider how professional bodies such as the Museums Association have attempted to support and diversify the workforce. What has worked and how might such initiatives be developed in the future?

Bio: Tamsin’s career has focused on workforce and organisational development, in public and private sectors. She currently leads on workforce in the broadest sense at the Museums Association, from research to funding, strategy to delivery, providing career workshops, speaking on ethics, equity, and wellbeing; and leading formal professional development, mentoring and online learning programmes.

**Andrea Meyer, Modernizing the Museum - Initiatives and Crises of the German Museums Association (1917-1933)**

The German Museums Association, founded in 1917 in the midst of the First World War, did not have an easy time gaining a foothold as a professional interest group in the Weimar Republic, which was shaken by political and economic crises. It was only towards the end of the 1920s that the association succeeded in establishing itself more broadly. A clear sign of this was the opening of the all-male club to at least a dozen of woman employees with academic background. They represented the hierarchy of museum staff across the board, from trainees to collection managers to directors. However, the association was also important for woman art historians who turned to the office as job seekers. Thanks to archival material of the association, which includes their applications, CVs and references, both the support from the association’s managing directors and the women’s struggle for a position as curators can be reconstructed. By turning to these early museum women, gender related barriers in the historic museum world become strikingly visible.

Bio: Andrea Meyer is an art historian working at Technische Universität Berlin. Her primary areas of research are museum studies and European visual arts of the 19th/early 20th century. Following a project on efforts to modernize museum practice in Germany around 1900, she currently conducts research into women’s museum careers and the artistic reception of collections from colonial contexts.

Session 2 Reframing expertise: pay, affiliation and status

**Kathleen Lawther, Motivations, money and management: impacts on collections work**

‘Some of this work was, again, motivated by the need to supplement an extremely small income, rather than by a commitment to museum archaeology’ (Hill, 2016).

Focussing on museum documentation, the paper will look at paid and un(der)paid work, ideas about professionalism and the effect on roles, attitudes, and who does the work. Payment for work increases the diversity of a field by removing a financial barrier to entry. Payment recognises the value of the work, and the skill and expertise of the worker. A worker enters into a contract, agrees to be managed, and to be responsible for completing set tasks in a certain way. The attributes of professionals include autonomy, the ability to make one’s own decisions based on expertise, and a sense of altruism, which is contrasted with work done to earn money (Weil, 1994). The formalisation of collections documentation practice through computerisation (Parry, 2007) and the introduction of standards schemes like Accreditation in the UK, has been at odds with the autonomy of the curatorial profession which developed from the practice of ‘serious leisure’ (Moncunill-Piñas, 2015). How does this impact collections work today? Are some privileged curators able to retain more autonomy by choosing work based on interest rather than financial compensation?

Bio: Kathleen Lawther is a freelance curator and collections researcher with over 10 years’ experience managing and documenting museum collections in museums of all sizes. In September 2022 she began a PhD studentship at the University of Leicester, looking at the history and practice of collections documentation and its implications for digital collections innovation. Previously, she received a Headley Fellowship from the Art Fund to work on the project Museum Makers: People Centred Cataloguing with the Powell-Cotton Museum. She is a member of the steering group of Museum as Muck, the network for working class museum people.

**Mark Liebenrood, Li Yuan-Chia and the LYC Museum – an amateur artist-curator?**

The Chinese artist Li Yuan-Chia ran the LYC Museum in Cumbria between 1972 and 1983. He came to the UK as an established professional artist, but with no training in museum work. Nonetheless Li developed his new museum into a popular community-oriented centre for contemporary art and craft with an exhibition programme that changed monthly and included international artists, some of whom became well established in the art world.

This paper considers Li’s activities at the museum, which included construction, curating, and running a printing press, examines the role of the dual supports of private and public funding, and asks how his work might be viewed within the categories of amateur and professional.

Li’s distinctive philosophy shaped many of the museum’s activities and I will outline some of the precedents that may have informed his participatory approach, as well as tracing aspects of the networks that Li and some of his friends and collaborators formed in the process of establishing and running the museum. Although the LYC was unique in many respects, its example has the potential to enrich wider discussions on the role of artists and so-called amateur work in cultural institutions.

Bio: Mark Liebenrood completed his PhD on UK museum closure at Birkbeck in 2022, alongside research work for the Mapping Museums and Museums in the Pandemic projects. He undertook an early career fellowship at the John Rylands Institute at the University of Manchester in 2022–23, where he examined the archives of Li Yuan-Chia and the LYC Museum.

**Liliana Milkova, Inclusive Collection Interpretation and the Gallery Guide Program at the Yale University Art Gallery**

Museums in the USA continue to rely on adult volunteers to lead tours of permanent expositions and special exhibitions. In 2010, the Yale University Art Gallery (YUAG), a mid-size campus museum with a global collection, disbanded its group of volunteers who offered guided tours of the collection and shifted to a new model where trained paid undergraduate students lead all regularly scheduled tours for the general public. This presentation outlines the rationale for such a shift, highlights the main characteristics of YUAG’s student Gallery Guide program, and explores the benefits of working with students as tour guides in the context of the campus/academic museum. Emphasis will be placed on inclusion and access as the key elements in the conception and implementation of both the yearlong training that the student guides go through and the tours that they develop and lead. Finally, the presentation will offer a framework for inclusive collection interpretation through the lens of thematic, dialogue-based tours designed to make art more broadly accessible and to expand the concept of what is a collection highlight and who determines what belongs in this category.

Bio: Liliana Milkova, Head of Education and Nolen Curator of Education and Academic Affairs, leads the Yale University Art Gallery’s educational and teaching initiatives, overseeing public education, public programs, and curricular engagement. Liliana holds an A.B. in Art History and Old World Archaeology from Brown University and a PH.D. in Modern and Contemporary Art from the University of Pennsylvania. She has published on many topics, such as pedagogy, 20thcentury art, photography, and political propaganda, and she has also held several prestigious fellowships, including a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Photographs at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

**Amara Thornton, Museum Lectures in Context: Beyond Notability and the Peripatetic Lecturer**

The team working on the AHRC funded project ‘Beyond Notability: Re-Evaluating Women’s Work in Archaeology, History and Heritage 1870-1950’ have created a database of over 500 women active in these fields. Through detailed archival research, augmented by other primary and secondary source material, the team have constructed a framework for understanding women’s work in context, including work with museums and the collections held in them.

As a young woman in the 1890s, the classicist Eugenie Sellers Strong, later admitted as one of the earliest Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries, gave lectures in the British Museum in association with the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching. She was not alone in this – Jane Ellen Harrison, Maria Millington Lathbury (later Lady Evans), Ethel Burton-Brown, among many others did as well. This presentation will discuss how all of these university-educated women were judged on acquired expertise and experience to become extension lecturers, and, when appointed, delivered teaching both with the museum – via ‘demonstrations’ – and outside it, bringing ancient pasts captured in museum collections to audiences across the city and beyond.

Bio: Dr Amara Thornton is Research Fellow at the Institute of Classical Studies, University of London, and Co-Investigator of the 3 year AHRC funded project “Beyond Notability: Re-Evaluating Women’s Work in Archaeology, History and Heritage, 1870-1950”. Amara previously worked as Research Officer for the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology at the University of Reading, where she organised a workshop and co-curated an exhibition on women’s work as collectors, curators and cataloguers. She is co-editor (with Dr Katy Soar) of Strange Relics: Stories of Archaeology and the Supernatural 1895-1954 (Handheld Press, 2022) and the author of Archaeologists in Print: Publishing for the People (UCL Press, 2018).

Session 3 Representing the professional: language and image

**Nicky Reeves, Making Museum Work**

My focus is on large, comparatively well-funded, North American & Western European institutions with substantial stored or reserve collections, including UK National Museums, in the last 15 years. Starting from Lucy Suchman's 1995 claim that ‘representations of work are not proxies for some independently existing organisational process but are part of the fabric of meanings within and out of which all working practices are made’ [1], I look at how competing museum personas are variously made real through discourse, text, photos and video. What anxieties about elitism and usefulness are revealed from the insistence on the workiness of ‘museum work’? What forms of solidarity are at play, and how sincere or productive are they? Does the persona of ‘the museum worker’ help overcome historical hierarchies that elevated curatorial and connoisseurial practices and attitudes at the expense of others? Specifically, what are the consequences of a frequent emphasis on the physical movement and literal handling of museum collections, dressed in appropriate workwear, for notions of possession and ownership, access, accountability and inclusion? I conclude by trying to use a critique of notions of transparency and immediacy to make some sense of these representations of museum work.

[1] Lucy Suchman, ‘Making Work Visible’, Communications of the ACM 38, no. 9 (1995), p.58

Bio: Nicky Reeves has been the Curator of Scientific and Medical History Collections at The Hunterian, University of Glasgow since 2014, where he continues to oversee the decant, cataloguing and rationalisation of a large and quite messy collection of scientific instruments & associated material culture. Nicky actively contributes to teaching across the University, including supervising PhD students, and convening a 20-credit course entitled Curating the Sciences on the Museum Studies MSc. His research interests include the history of astronomy, the aesthetics and politics of visible storage and behind-the-scenes tours, fake rhino horns, and broken objects.

**Lewis Ryder, The Museum and the Pest: The Contest for Cultural Authority in Early Twentieth-Century British Museums**

The professionalisation of British museums in the early twentieth century coincided with increased social mobility and the democratisation of art collecting and expertise. This paper explores the tense relationship between these processes through the case study of John Hilditch (1872-1930), an art collector from a working-class background who was excluded from exhibiting at Manchester Art Gallery and the V&A as his collection, and character, did not meet their professional standards. Through an analysis of the galleries’ relationship with Hilditch I’ll show how museum professionals politicised the classed language of taste to erect a hierarchy of expertise which ostracised working and lower-middle class art commentators. What makes Hilditch’s case so interesting, though, is that he contested their expertise and fabricated his own superior expertise through a series of lies. Analysing the types of expertise he claimed, and how they were received by the general public, this paper will show the precarity of professional expertise. A valorisation for ‘practical’ knowledge and an attack on bookish experts shows how alternative hierarchies of expertise existed based on more ‘everyday’ ways of knowing. The paper thus argues that social class could be weaponised by ordinary people, as well as the museum professionals, undermining the professionalisation process.

Bio: I’m a Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Manchester. My research focus is Modern Britain, particularly the relationship between museums, British imperialism and the politics of culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. My current project examines John Hilditch, a collector of Chinese art who spent twenty years challenging national and local museum officials’ authority and expertise.

**Samantha Evans, The Museum of them and us: boundaries, hierarchies, and class-based inequality in UK museum work**

This paper presents research into the boundaries around, and hierarchies within, the field of UK museum work, showing how these contribute to classed-based inequality. Using data from 57 interviews and 9 focus groups with UK museum workers, and applying a Bourdieusian lens, it illustrates how UK museum work is shaped by three, sometimes competing discourses. These are, a) an historic discourse of ‘keeping collections special’, b) a newer discourse of inclusivity and social justice (or ‘Museums Change Lives’, Museums Association, 2013), and c) a pragmatic discourse of the market. It shows how each of these discourses privilege different, and often unreconciled, ways of doing, having and being (for example, curating versus fundraising, distinguishing knowledge versus communicative capital, being dedicated versus enterprising) and considers how they each contribute to the problem of class-based inequality in UK museum work.

The paper will also use images chosen by UK museum workers to illustrate the three types of class-based inequality within UK museum work; that of a) between individuals; b) between positions and c) between employer and employee. The paper will aim to re-imagine solutions to class-based inequality.

Bio: Dr Samantha Evans is a Chartered Psychologist and Lecturer in Organization Studies in the School of Management, at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her doctoral research: Struggles for distinction; class and classed inequality in UK museum work (2020), was conducted under the supervision of Dr Rebecca Whiting, in the Department of Organizational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London, and won the Philip Pullman prize for best thesis in the School of Business. She has published in Gender, Work & Organization and is continuing to publish from this research. She has also researched work-based inequality (class, age, and gender), and people’s career experiences within the NHS, theatre directing and universities.

Before academia, Sam worked in the museum sector, holding positions at the V&A Museum, Museums Association, National Archives, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, and National Gallery.

**Jennifer Warren, Professionalism and The 'Progressive' Art Museum: The Case of MACBA**

My research focusses on experiments in so-called ‘radical museology’ of the late 1990s and 2000s in European contemporary art museums, through a case study - the Museu d’Art Contemporani Barcelona (MACBA) from 1998-2009 under director Manuel Borja Villel. At this session, I plan to use this case study to address the entrenchment of ‘professionalism’ at these institutions via the emergence of a new kind of curator/director. I will trace these developments through the convergence of managerial language with critical poststructuralist theory (see, for example, the use of the phrase ‘Board of Trustees from below’ which was used at MACBA to describe a desired relationship with local activists. This ‘progressive’ institutional language has to some extent been mainstreamed since.

I argue that this development is worth further attention not least because this developed in institutions which saw themselves as expressly ‘activist’ and as ‘engines of social transformation’, working to correct the exclusions evident in the modernist museum. I ask how this language might present barriers to undoing museum hierarchies? Why should it be seen as a symptom of ‘knowledge economy’ rationalities emerging within the institution and as an agent of casualisation rather than the antidote to it?

Bio: Jennifer Warren is a researcher based at Chelsea College of Art in the final year of her AHRC funded PhD which investigates instances of so-called ‘Radical Museology’ in Europe in the late 1990s to mid-2000s. She completed an MRes in Exhibition Studies based within the Afterall Research Centre in 2017 and is now a regular visiting lecturer at Goldsmiths (MA Culture Industry) and LSBU/Whitechapel Gallery (MA Curating and Public Programmes). Before her MA and PHD Jennifer worked for a number of museums and galleries in front of house roles, which informs her critique of institutional hierarchies and she is engaged in trade union organising in the cultural sector.