Imagining the *Not-Museum*
Power, Pleasure, and Radical Museological Community

Dana Carlisle Kletchka, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University

Adéwálé Adénlé
Shannon Thacker Cregg
Anna Freeman
Damarius Johnson
Megan Wanttie
Logan Ward
The Ohio State University

ABSTRACT

This manuscript describes a semester-long engagement by members of a graduate course cohort to reckon with individual and collective understandings of contemporary art museum practices, the roots of which are deeply entrenched in colonial, Western, patriarchal discourses. In response to course readings, guest speakers, and embodied experiences, members of the group engaged in a project of resistance— shaped by open, ongoing dialogue and critical reflection about the field of museology and centered in both radical critique and boundless possibility. Inspired by Black Feminist scholars, curators, and justice-seekers (brown, 2019; Cooper, 2018; Autry, personal communication, November 15, 2019) who find pleasure in collective visions of world-building, they entered into a communal space of theoretical imaginings together to invoke a *not-museum*, a site with the potential to enable a socially-responsive, just, affirming ontology for their communities. The authors conclude with a manifesto that serves as a promise, a vision, and a tool with which to build such museums.

KEYWORDS: Art museums, Post-critical museology, Decolonialism, Critical pedagogy, Embodied experience

Every other fall, as a university professor who directs a museum education and administration specialization, I teach a graduate-level course about the history, theory, and practice(s) of the American Art museum. This course is one of four courses required to earn a graduate-level museum education and administration specialization in my department. The description and objectives for the course clearly outline a historical commitment to conceptualizing a complicated story that nonetheless recognizes the deep colonial, Western, patriarchal roots of art museums and much art museum practice. According to written comments on my faculty evaluations, students' experiences with the material in this course tend toward

two poles: Some are distressed at what they see as an overly negative depiction of institutions that they love. Others seem to revel in the museological complexity inherent in these cultural behemoths, of which they were heretofore fully unaware. Most of them leave the course fully intending to work in a museum after they graduate.They find promise in the prospect of working in art museums and hope that their critical foundations will enable them to work passionately toward a more socially responsive—and community centered—museological ontology (Dewdney, DiBosa, & Walsh, 2013; Kletchka, 2018).

This article highlights the experiences of several members of the Autumn 2019 class cohort, who thoughtfully engaged the class readings, projects, and speakers but also felt strongly that there needed to be a more robust conceptualization about the ways in which the class could be enacted as praxis in their future careers as museum professionals. They wanted to think deeply and write about how their theoretical interests and commitments might inform or offer alternative visions of what art museums are or might someday become. In this paper, we, the graduate students and I, position ourselves in relationship to academia and one another, elucidate the theoretical foundations that propel our project forward, and offer a manifesto that serves as a basis for our work in a radically different conception of museums than what we have come to know. Our project is grounded in author, activist, and doula adrienne marie brown's (2019) conception of pleasure activism, a radical political stance grounded in Black Feminist Theory that positions the work of transforming the world in an ethos of love and happiness. We situate this effort as a form of decolonizing our understandings that extend to practice; of activism that is rooted in pleasure, recognizing that "sourcing [our] power in our longing and pleasure is abundant justice. . . we can instead generate power from the overlapping space of desire and aliveness, tapping into an abundance that has enough attention, liberation, and justice for all of us to have plenty" (brown, 2019, p. 12). Notably, this project emanated from the perspective of a collective—even as the professor and each student valued a particular theoretical perspective and their personal lived experiences, they moved through the course as parts of a whole that pondered, discussed, and learned together, united by a sense of longing for just, equitable, and affirming art museum practices situated within a new conceptualization of possibility.

Who We Are

The seven of us, graduate students and an assistant professor at a large Midwestern university, represent a profound spectrum of lived experiences in terms of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, immigration status, and gender. We

represent the present and future of art museums and through this writing "seek to understand and learn from the politics and power dynamics" (brown, 2019, p. 13) inherent in their structure. We find great pleasure, personally and academically, in imagining art and other museums that are not just visitor-centered, but that are holistically committed to being socially responsive and steeped in the groundwork of anti-oppression.

We are aware of the problematic nature of both contemporary museology and academia. We recognize the frustrations and struggles of contemporary museum educators who are engaged in the evolving work of diversity and inclusion in their respective institutions, despite the fact that "the often slow pace of change in museums can be frustrating and demoralizing at times" (Ng & Ware, 2014, p. 44). We recognize implicit hierarchies between professor and student, Masters and Doctoral students, art museum curators and educators, as well as the systemic racism, sexism, homo- and transphobia, and xenophobia that pervades systems of power and seek to disrupt them by working together. In the space of this manuscript, we resist those hierarchies to the best of our abilities. We gather to write and create the not-museum as a conceptual space of imagination, hope, and possibility. That is our pleasure in this work.

As we continue, each of us has taken a different perspective on the current standing of art museum practices. Flowing through these analyses are questions and acknowledgements of historical marginalization, colonization, and identity. Each voice brings knowledge, learning, and experience that another may not be able to provide. We take pleasure in learning from one another through our writing. As brown suggested in her manifesto on love as political resistance, we situate ourselves in a space of radical honesty—as we enter into this space, we accept one another and value one another with a deep appreciation for our differences. We resist traditional hierarchies by declaring that our stories, thoughts, and experiences are valid. We recognize that love requires shaping inevitable change and building "communities of care" (brown, 2019, p. 63). This museological moment provides a unique opportunity for critique, analysis, and envisioning new ways of being and knowing in decolonized art museums. It is our pleasure to embark on this project together.

Our Foundations

Our coming together as a community is informed by our previous personal and professional experiences in museums, including paid positions in education/learning and visitor services, as volunteers and interns, and as enthusiastic visitors. We navigated the course with readings that situate museums —historically and in the present— as

contested sites, informed by social, political, economic, and racial discourses. In addition to contextualizing museums as part of historical research presentations in class, we engaged in the process of critically examining the Wexner Center for the Arts using art historian Margaret Lindauer's (2006) "The Critical Museum Visitor" framework, professor Claire Bishop's musings on the relationship between museums and visitors in Radical Museology (2013), and the MASS Action (Museum as Site for Social Action) Toolkit (2017). Broadly speaking, these sources became tools for us to constructively question how authority is manifested through structural power and privilege in art museum galleries and to understand the ways in which others have grappled with that dynamic. Our physical engagement with the campus art center provoked localized questions about embodied experiences, including surveillance of our bodies through cameras and guards (whom one student interpreted as "museum police"), the rather pronounced physical inaccessibility of the gallery spaces and small print on didactic labels, and the privileging of the English language and curatorial knowledge on didactic labels in an institution that serves an incredibly diverse, global constituency.

Additionally, La Tanya Autry (@artstuffmatters) visited The Ohio State campus to lecture to the Department of Arts Administration, Education and Policy and dialogue with the members of our graduate class. She offered ways to decolonize—or act in purposeful ways to center Black and Indigenous experiences—and challenge the white, patriarchal narratives that serve as a foundation for much museological practice. These are drawn from her personal and curatorial projects, her experience as a co-founder of the #museumsarenotneutral movement (Autry & Murawski, 2019), and as an initiator of the Social Justice Resource list.[1] Her generosity in sharing her experiences as a Black woman, a doctoral student, and a curator in art museums, in addition to her sharing of academic resources, books, and online projects, inspired our group to think deeply about the future of art museums and actions that we might take. Our conversation with her engendered a long and fruitful discussion about racist, colonialist foundations of contemporary museological practice and how we might use theory to envision anti-oppressive ways of being for museums.

We set about, at Ms. Autry's urging, in imagining characteristics of what we eventually came to understand as a not-museum, which began as a list of oppositional statements to what we considered current problematic philosophies and practices. We initially

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1 https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PyqPVslEPiq0Twnn4YYVXopk3q-426J95nISRxvkQI_Q/edit?fbclid=IwAR0HNtgM7gWAzJZ8sZDFwQ7_jqOnUtyk7ANk-jH-qBMIGZUIOBYJkivb7RMI

referred to this process as envisioning an "anti-museum" but felt uncomfortable situating our work in polarities rather than in visions of decolonial possibility. As we engaged with texts and each other, we expressed distinct, individual, and particular conceptions of the not-museum that established the classroom as a space for teaching, learning, and collaboration. This process enabled us to collectively produce a manifesto, which simultaneously serves as a vision, a statement, and a promise, that we as scholars, thinkers, educators, and cultural workers intend to ground our work in radical service to communities.

Shaping Future Practice
Theoretical Imaginings Toward the Not-Museum

Throughout the semester, as we developed our collective vision of a manifesto, we began to recognize our individual perspectives on museum work. Each author's view of the not-museum, expressed below, is rooted in distinct theoretical concerns: insights from African American history museums, decolonialism, critical curriculum practices and pedagogy, disability studies, the politics of identity and representation, and embodied experience/authentic engagement with African art. The diversity of concerns and interests among us indicates the variety of productive, compelling, and meaningful work to be done in art museums.

Damarius Johnson: Learning from African American history museums. Contemporary art museums are one of many cultural institutions devoted to art museum education. By decentering art museums as privileged sites for art education, alternative traditions of museum practice become visible. Although institutional histories and biographies of founding museum directors remain insightful historical sources, I offer a history of ideas and practices within African American history museums that highlights community outreach, institution-building, and art exhibition practices. Like many museums that curate the history and culture of ethnic or sexual minorities, African American history museums utilize art exhibitions to reinforce group identity, provide social commentary, and forecast desirable futures.

African American history museums originate in practices of self-help and community education. Throughout the 19th century, African Americans engaged literary societies, newspapers, social movements, and faith communities as platforms to disseminate African American history (Wright, 1996). Historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson formalized these efforts when he created "Negro History Week" (known today as Black History Month) in 1923 as an annual holiday to promote African American cultural pride and celebrate the year-round study of

African American history (Woodson, 1950). Although the first African American history museum was Hampton University's College Museum (1868), by the 1960s, African American "neighborhood museums" emerged as institutional homes for public history outreach (Burns, 2008, p. 40–41). In the wake of the Black Power Movement and widespread observance of Kwanzaa in the 1970s, neighborhood museums featured African American artists who linked aesthetic representations of Black life to emancipatory visions of Black social movements (Fenderson, 2019; Zorach, 2019).

The professional organization for African American museum professionals, African American Museum Association (now called AAAM), formed in 1976 (African American Museums Association, 1982). A 1982 AAAM report indicates that Dr. Margaret Burroughs and Dr. Charles Wright convened early national conferences that built professional networks for AAAM. Burroughs was an art educator, visual and literary artist who co-founded the Ebony Museum of Negro History and Art (known today as DuSable Museum of African American History) in 1961 (Burns, p. 39–41). Burroughs was among a generation of Black artists who contributed their talents, labors, and works to sustain African American history museums (Zorach, 2019). During the first two years of AAAM, the Museum of the National Center for Afro-American Artists (NCAAA) housed the organization. Edmund Barry Gaither, the Director of the Museum of the NCAAA, was also inaugural president of AAAM (African American Museums Association, 1982, p. 4–6). AAAM represents a legacy of administrative, intellectual, and institutional collaborations among African American artists, educators, and museum professionals.

I anticipate the not-museum as a conceptual space and brick and mortar institution that incorporates lessons from African American history museums by confronting the uncomfortable pasts and unsettling legacies of race. The not-museum is a gathering space to strategize and mobilize communities to bear witness to Black suffering and name agents of white supremacist violence. Yet, in recognizing white supremacy as a historic, contemporary, and oppressive structural arrangement (Bell, 1992; Coates, 2015; Copeland & Wilderson, 2017; Mills, 1997), the non-museum resists acquiescence to nihilism, despair, and defeatism. Exhibitions of social commentary and critique are situated alongside exhibitions that feature the transformative and imaginative visions of social justice movements. By featuring social commentary alongside visions of justice, museums communicate that social change is desirable, conceivable, and achievable (Burns, 2008; Kelley, 2002).

Anna Freeman: Decolonialism. The not-museum is a metaphysical space where Western museum conventions begin to shift and morph. This is a space of possibility and is one where decoloniality persists. Semiotician Walter Mignolo defines decoloniality as "the exercise of

power within the colonial matrix to undermine the mechanism that keeps it in place requiring obeisance" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 114). Simply put, decoloniality can be defined as the "state"/quality of being decolonial. However, in practice this presents a challenge. Through this semester I have become more aware of positionality and the importance of praxis. Latin American Cultural Studies professor Catherine Walsh contends that praxis involves the ability "to think from and with subjects, actors, thinkers, collectives, and movements that are signifying, sowing, and growing decoloniality in/as praxis" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 20). I take pleasure in learning about my indigenous Andean roots and find strength through moving as a collective body that takes a stance on unjust and oppressive institutional models.

La Tanya Autry's visit encouraged me to reflect deeply on my positionality and the future of art museums. In Autry's presentation she spoke about moments of resistance, places of possibilities, and claims of neutrality. She asked the audience to consider what decolonial means to them. She urged us to seek out different knowledge systems and build networks with people of different backgrounds. In class, Autry prompted us to spend time thinking about temporary spaces of joy and freedom (Simpson, 2014). Her candor provided me with a great sense of possibility for the field and left me feeling that I could not only break boundaries, but further expose them. Prior to Autry's visit I became involved with Ohio State's K'acha Willaykuna Curator Working Group that cares for an Andean and Amazonian collection on campus. At weekly meetings, we problematized means of accessibility and explored nuanced ways of display paired with a tactile or immersive virtual reality component. I joined this working group to learn more about my Andean heritage, collaborate with others, and extend my own expertise. In practice, I choose to align my act of resistance with the words of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, an indigenous writer and academic, who writes,

> We cannot just think, write or imagine our way to decolonized future. Answers on how to rebuild and how to resurge are therefore derived from a web of consensual relationships that is infused with movement (kinetic) through lived experience and embodiment. Intellectual knowledge is not enough on its own. (Simpson, 2014, p.16)

Our long-term goals include developing an accessible space to house the collection and to activate the work through Andean concepts that adhere to playful practices. These curatorial forays enable me to imagine the not-museum is a place where museum administrators and staff seek out the rightful owners of indigenous cultural property and make it known that possession of these objects are a result of

indigenous genocide and forced assimilation.

Megan Wanttie: Critical curriculum practices and pedagogy.
Decolonial practices in the museum and critical museum pedagogy
call for the rewriting and re-envisioning of the histories that are
told within the museum to better represent the multiplicities in
our society, in our histories, and in our futures. These practices
seek to criticize and transform curricular experiences—intended to
moralize, acculturate, and assimilate the population by replacing
the singular, privileged discourse that exists within museums—with
multivocal, community-based critical curriculum that is grounded
in a socially-responsive, anti-oppressive foundations. In order to
disrupt hegemonic curricula, one must acknowledge that, "all
knowledge is situated and partial" (Sabzalian, 2018, p. 362). Curricula
in museums shape the cultural and art historical narratives about
our shared histories and have historically functioned as systems that
perpetuate hierarchies of class, gender, and race (Hooper-Greenhill,
1992). Elite, Eurocentric, and heteronormative interests are served
through exhibition of so-called high art accompanied by moralizing
and "culturizing" content primarily in the form of didactic wall text,
supplementary and supporting materials, talks, and tours (Mayo,
2013). Additionally, the art historical canon establishes a singular,
privileged discourse that privileges Eurocentric perspectives and
narratives.

The use of curriculum scholar William Pinar's (2004) hidden
curriculum can be applied to analyze museum curricula by searching
for the known and unknown forces that act together to assume a
proper, and conversely improper, type of knowledge and behavior
that reinforces and recreates the status quo. In museums, we can look
to the types of objects exhibited, the conversations and programs
around certain art objects, and the collecting practices of the donors
and museum. We may stake a claim that museum education is not
completed in formal educational settings. Instead, docents, curators,
and museum educators share the task of creating a curriculum for
the public based on the display of art objects. Object labels, audio
tours, programs, gallery talks, and tours are some of the formalized
mechanisms utilized within the museum space to provide educational
and interpretive material to visitors (Vallance, 2004).

More than a question of educational content, the not-museum
acknowledges the reality that museums often perpetuate racist,
classist, misogynistic, ableist, and heteronormative content.
Art museum educators and museum staff must recognize the
manifestations of white supremacy in the museum through
exhibitions, discussions around art objects, and the overall crafted
narrative existent within the museum (Dewhurst & Hendrick, 2018).
The responsibility of this role requires the recognition that the history

of museums is deeply problematic and often violent.
Museums should renounce the idolatry of the masterpiece, denounce systems of classification and boundaries that create hierarchies, and immerse themselves in spaces of unknowing (Hein, 2007). Only with these new impetuses can the museum engage in critical and productive dialogues with communities that serve to overturn historic hegemonic narratives. The potential for socially oriented, civically-responsible, and politicized museum spaces requires that we be mindful of theories that call upon us to recognize that museums are not apolitical and neutral spaces of equitable knowledge. Knowledge production and distribution will always be political; functioning under the guise of a so-called morality, inherent good, or natural makes the power of the museum even more insidious.

In order to counter the oppressive forces of the hegemonic, White supremacist institutionalized museum, we propose that the not-museum engage in practices that re-write the singular history presented in the museum space—both literally and figuratively. The not-museum should pay particular attention to what is on display, how it is displayed, and what is written and spoken about the objects on and off-view. The not-museum should seek to represent the things that have been hidden and erased from our communal histories; it should draw attention to the ways that the museum is not neutral (Autry & Murawski, 2019). The not-museum ought to be critical of the practices that it engages in and should infinitely question the motives and consequences of what a museological practice does. In practice, at the very least this means re-writing label copy; pulling out objects that have been buried in storage; reconsidering how we arrange, display, classify, and define art objects and artists; acquiring new objects from artists previously excluded from the art historical canon and the museum; seeking out opportunities to engage in inquiry-based and dialogue-based learning in the galleries with the communities that we serve; offering new opportunities for engagement in the museum space through programming, events, and more that are created to disrupt the status quo; and engaging in a constant, iterative process of redefining what it means to be a museum. The not-museum should be a space of creativity, criticality, risk, excitement, community engagement, and constant evolution. Ultimately, what we propose with the not-museum is the reconfiguration the museum without fear—and with a hope for what it could be in the future.

Shannon Thacker Cregg: Disability studies. In imagining the not-museum, possibilities for emancipatory approaches toward disability emerge from the field of disability studies. Historically, museums positioned visitors with disabilities as recipients of charity rather than as equals, as exemplified by programming and accommodations that treated visitors with disabilities as recipients of welfare (Sandell, 2019). Despite a push toward increased diversity and inclusion,

museums still struggle to include visitors with disabilities equitably, and attendance remains low for visitors with disabilities (National Endowment for the Arts, 2015).

A disability studies framework re-orients the ways that museums conceptualize visitors with disabilities. In response to issues with inclusion of disability in museums, scholars have responded by recommending that the social model of disability be incorporated into exhibitions on disability, educational programming, and museum decision making processes (Hollins, 2010; Johnson, 2018; Ginley, Goodwin, & Smith, 2012; McGinnis, 1999; McGinnis, 2007; Sandell, 2019). The social model of disability, which was crucial to the Disability Rights Movement and is linked to the field of disability studies, argued that disability is not the result of a physical or mental impairment, but is due to oppression and barriers that people with disabilities face. Instead of conceptualizing a disability as a deficit, the social model recognizes the systems of inequality due to ableism-the preference for a non-disabled population (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). Therefore, the social model of disability can transform the way that museums understand visitors with disabilities.

 Instead of positioning visitors with disabilities as a special interest group in need of accommodations and specialized programming, disability studies utilizes the social model to highlight the voices, knowledges, and experiences of individuals with disabilities. Disability studies re-frames disability as an agentive identity in which valuable sources of knowledge and experience are produced (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). Therefore, when a disability studies framework is applied to museums, disability is no longer understood as a deficit or as a category in need of charity. Instead, people with disabilities are positioned as central to the functioning of the museum.

In addition to re-framing the way that disability is understood, a disability studies framework can transform museums through challenging normative educational practices. When a disability studies approach is incorporated into education, inclusivity is key. No longer is disability regarded as a reason to create separate and specialized programming that separates visitors with and without disabilities. Instead, disability studies critically questions the efficacy of educational systems—such as special education—that separate students with and without disabilities. Additionally, disability studies recognizes how normative educational standards segregate students based on difference due to ableism (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). Instead, disability studies re-positions disability as an "ordinary human variation" rather than a pathology (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004). Therefore, when disability studies is incorporated into museum education, alternate ways of understanding the world are equally valued and considered as part of human variation. Furthermore, when disability

studies is incorporated into education, the focus shifts to removing barriers to access instead of remediating the disability. Additionally, disability studies recognizes how disability identity is entwined with other forms of identity such as sexuality, religion, gender, and race (Goodley, 2017). Therefore, disability studies offers possibilities beyond just a critique of ableism. One way that this is present is that inclusive educational practices for disability often incorporate theories, such as critical pedagogy, that seek to include students based on multiple forms of identity (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Goodley, 2017). Therefore, a museum education practice informed by disability studies considers the power dynamics between facilitator and participants, museum and visitors, as well as the intersecting nature of oppression.

Disability studies has the potential to guide museums in resisting normative and ableist educational practices. It creates a site of possibility for museums to transform into not-museums through questioning not only what disability means, but also investigating the intersecting nature of oppression and the implications for our communities.

Logan Seay Ward: The politics of identity and representation. The Western conception of Asian art follows a strict hierarchy with China and Japan at the top and everyone else at the bottom (Kim, 2014, p. 8). This is strongly reflected in the display of Asian art in United States museums, where China and Japan are represented with larger permanent exhibition spaces than their Asian counterparts. This is not unusual, considering that museums have historically organized space to reflect world domination and power (Duncan and Wallach, 2004). One example of this phenomenon may be found in the Cleveland Museum of Art's joint Korea-Japan gallery. Separated only by cases, three-quarters of the room is dedicated to Japan, and one quarter to Korea, despite the fact that the total amount of Korean objects in the museum's permanent collection numbers 200 more than its Japanese counterparts (Cleveland Museum of Art, 2016; Cleveland Museum of Art, 2020) In this case, size does not equal representation; clearly other organizing principles are at play.

The history of Korean art in United States art museums reproduces hegemonies that position Korea within the colonial shadow of Japan. According to the catalogue for the exhibition Korean Art from the United States (Lee & Park, 2012) at the National Museum of Korea, the collections in United States art museums have something in common—most of the objects were accessioned during the Japanese Colonial Period (1910–1945). At that time, Japan produced a great deal of art historical research on Korea. However, the major initiative of these projects was to demonstrate that "Korea had no creative or independent culture of its own," and that it was merely a "conduit"

between China and Japan (Kim, 2016, p. 9). Japan, as the colonial superior, situated Korea as its colonial inferior. As a consequence, many Korean artifacts that were excavated and collected or taken ended up classified as Chinese or Japanese objects in United States art museums.

Today, the story of Korea that United States art museums tell still lacks critical discussion. As Choi (2016) discusses, museums that function through Eurocentric concepts of art "dilute the cultural history from which the object originated," resulting in a "sensibility" of [Korean] art that is not true (p. 76). Museums reproduce hegemonies by ciphering what is and is not said about an object. Hooper-Greenhill's (2000) post-museum paradigm is one way for museums to engage in critical discussion on power. Museums can recognize and denounce their position as an "authoritative source," and museum workers may become "border-crossers" by initiating critical dialogue with visitors and promoting diverse narratives (p. 140). This follows a constructivist principle of meaning by positioning meaning as social (p. 139). Museums resist their tendency to reproduce hegemonic structures through narrative when they reposition themselves as learners along with visitors.

Like art education scholar Eunjung Choi (2016), I believe that "decentering the traditional and singular ways of viewing Korean objects," can change how museums consider objects overall (p. 80). Korean art in the United States is only one of many cases that show how power incorporates the narratives that museums (re)produce. As Trouillot (1995) argues, "power is constitutive of the story," (p. 28). If museums wish to change for the better, power as it is manifested through cultural representation must be central to that discussion.

Adéwálé Adénlé: Embodied experience/authentic engagement.
"Kneel down, close your eyes, and let us pray." This was the command that was given to my mother upon her conversion to Christianity in the early 1970s. She hearkened to the voice of the colonialists, spoken through the 20th Century African converts. By the time she opened her eyes, the black charcoal pot (ìṣásùn) that used to cook my favorite jute leaf soup (ewédú) and the clay pot (ààmù) that provided natural cold water, were all gone. Her newly found religion has succeeded in convoking the release of these items, as they were considered part of the tools that made up the "dark past," or as the missionaries would say, Africa's Christ-less generation. Accordingly, the ìṣásùn and the ààmù now being the instruments of the "devil" were to be destroyed alongside other statues and traditional icons. Replacing my beloved ìṣásùn and ààmù were China's porcelain, glittering forks, and the Holy Bible.

On visiting the British Museum in 2000, I was startled to see a semblance of my mother's ìṣásùn, now an object of endearment, entombed in a glass casing. This object, which hitherto functioned on a high density and degree of open fire, has been consigned to the coldness of an air-conditioned environment. Perhaps more than the environmental reality and paid admission fee to view my traditional ìṣásùn, I was perturbed by the didactic panels and labels in which the spiritual and functional contexts of this object were supplanted by narratives that embodied western aesthetics, referred to Eurocentric artistic processes, and a canonized construct of what they should be and not what they are. Prior to this visit, I had subscribed to African art scholar Roy Sieber's (1999) analytical posit that colonialists and missionaries effected cataclysmic ends to these objects (p. 14). Obviously, the destruction that Sieber mentioned did not apply to some of the African traditional and spiritual objects that were later found in the West. While some were ethically or deceptively acquired, going by my mother's ìṣásùn, many were forcefully gotten. Obtaining these objects in an unethical manner divorces the substance and context of their creation from their representation, as they become susceptible to "the problem of cross-cultural translation" (Cole, Poynor, & Visona, 2008, p. 10) and ethnocentrism. This is reflected in the accuracy of their interpretations and by extension affects visitors' experiences and engagements in Western art museums.

Presently in United States art museums, there are evolving discourses and advocacies for "socially-responsive practices" through dialogical approaches between communities and museums (Kletchka, 2018, p. 300). These interactions, when applied to curators and educators of African traditional and religious objects, should include communities and cultures where these objects originated. Traditional African objects within "traditional museum practice" (Anderson, 2012, p. 2) of exclusive representation and Eurocentric interpretations have endured performative disconnections from their original religious and mythological practices. Their educational manifestation in this domain remain intrinsically tied to their original purposes, materiality, and "anonymous" artists. Advancing a not-museum should therefore include returning to objects' African roots, where religious and cultural precepts can be learned within a broader framework of art historical studies. These studies are critical to dismantling the conventional canonized and hegemonic descriptions that permeate non-western objects.

The process of creating African traditional and religious art may include a ritual connecting the "physical to the metaphysical and the human to the divine" (Lawal, 2007, p. 15). The rituality in this creative process varies from one culture to the other. In some cultures, connection to the divine are observed through the use of organic materials believed to have metaphysical powers. In many

African cultures, artistic creation is a construct of and from continued consultations with varied deities relevant to the functional intention of the work. In a process of curatorial and interpretive exchange, intersecting the progenies of artists with the formative relevance of these deities may reinvent museum paradigms, shifting "the focus from internal to global (and) singular voice to multiple perspectives" (Anderson, 2012, p. 6). Additionally, in a not-museum, the didactic labels and signage applied to traditional and spiritual African objects would be liberated from the confines of Western hegemonic and "hierarchical languages" (deSouza, 2018, p. 40). Etymological and spiritual words or voices defining some objects and ceremonies would be left untranslated whenever they defy precise interpretive languages. Finally, authentic representations in a not-museum would not be limited to, or substantiated only by, the originality of these objects. The use of replicas, re-creations, and ceremonial re-enactments are of essence where original objects are absent. What should be of importance is the factuality of descriptive theories, given that "the authenticity of the experience, rather than the authenticity of the object" (MacDonald, 1988, p. 32) is far more consequential.

Conclusion

We conclude our ruminations with a manifesto inspired by the writings of another Black feminist author and professor, Brittany Cooper. In her recent work *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*, Cooper recognizes that critical stances, even toward those things that we cherish, have a tendency to remove the joy and pleasure that they otherwise might evoke. She writes:

> I actually think it is irresponsible to wreck shop in people's world without giving them the tools to rebuild . . . . the harder work is helping people find better tools to work with. We have to smash the patriarchy, for sure. And we have to dismantle white supremacy, and homophobia, and a whole bunch of other terrible shit that makes life difficult for people. Cooper, 2018, p. 274)

Our manifesto provides us with tools toward building art and other kinds of museums. It shapes our practices now and as we go out into the world, grateful for the time we spent together and hopeful for the future of what we now know as museums.

MANIFESTO

We root our work and activism in love and an ethic of care.

We critically consider our positionality as individuals, as educators, and as professionals and how those identities overlap.

We recognize and endeavor to destabilize hierarchical narratives that have long served to divide or subvert our communities and our work.

We learn from the myriad voices of Indigenous, Pan Asian, African and African diasporic communities, queer folx, and trans/women/ femmes who share their wisdom about ways of knowing and experiencing the world.

We privilege not just the visual, but sensory, emotive, aural, spiritual, religious, experiential, historical and political understandings and recognize the power that those relational ways of knowing hold for visitors and communities.

We value and embrace traditions of artistic production and representation that exist in cultural institutions beyond the mainstream art museum.

We recognize that museum architecture, exhibitions, collections, forms of pedagogy and interpretation, and cafe/museum shops form a curriculum of/for the body that positions visitors in specific ways and upholds particular cultural norms.

We position ourselves within a collective project that builds towards the not-museum as a range of accessible, inclusive, and equitable cultural institutions for our communities, the public, museum staff, directors and boards.

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