

# DECOLONIZING AS A VERB

## REINTERPRETING COLLECTIONS AND COLLECTING

### Online Seminar

Wednesday, 25 November – Thursday, 26 November 2020

**In recent years, museums across the globe have been tackling the challenges of decolonizing in their institutions. They do this in response to a growing demand from society that museums should face their historical selves and their inherited practices. Museums are challenged to acknowledge their past, understand how the past shaped the present and act on it today for a different future.**

Looking at the different approaches to decolonization worldwide, the term appears to be subject to different interpretations. Some define decolonization as a process that institutions undergo to expand the perspectives they portray beyond those of the dominant cultural group, particularly white colonizers whereas others define it as “at a minimum creating procedures for sharing authority on documentation and interpretation.”

The legacies of the colonial are ingrained in the social fabric of today’s society; they are stored in our bodily archives. Therefore, decolonization is not simply a matter of representation or repatriation. It concerns the language we speak, the archives we use, the way we categorize, what we collect, how the building is designed, the way topics and objects are researched and how knowledge is defined and shared.

COMCOL, ICOM-SA and SAMA are organizing a joint seminar to explore with international guests different concepts and practices of decolonization in the context of collection and collecting.



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## SESSION I Question of the Archive

We will start our program with a conversation between Achille Mbembe and Alexandra Bounia. Following the works of Mbembe, they will discuss amongst others the state of postcolonialism that emerges from the act of decolonization.

## SESSION II Unpacking decolonization - Theoretical perspectives

In this session we will discuss the thinking of decolonization in relations to bodies of theory. How is decolonization researched? What is considered knowledge? Museums are considered to be the loci of colonialism and colonial legacies. Ultimately the question is whether museums can be agents of repair using the existing framework of museum theory? If not, is it possible to re-imagine museums to become agents of change and what are the implications for museum practice, including collections and collecting.

## SESSION III Art and the Bodily Archive

In this session we talk to artists about how they use the archives from colonialism and imperialism to uncover narratives by unlearning, undoing existing patterns and repertoire. How we can shape space to create new art languages as an act of decolonization.

## SESSION IV Breakout sessions - Digging in

In this session we offer three parallel options where you can more hands on discuss and exchange:

- GROUP I Creating networks – Sharing Knowledge
- GROUP II Using new collecting strategies to fill the gaps in colonial collections
- GROUP III The colonial collection on trial – the falling statues

## SESSION V Decolonization as a verb – Getting practical

From the mind to the body, in this session we discuss how museum professionals worldwide translate the theory of decolonization into practice. With who are they engaging and how do they create a model where ideas of equal sharing of knowledge and capital are secured?



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## DAY ONE

WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2020

14:00 – 14:15

### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

- ◆ DANIELLE KUIJTEN  
ICOM COMCOL, President
- ◆ CATHERINE SNEL  
ICOM-SA, Chairperson
- ◆ HELENE VOLLGRAAFF  
SAMA President

SESSION I 14:15 – 15:15

### QUESTION OF THE ARCHIVE – INTERVIEW WITH ACHILLE MBEMBE

- ◆ Interviewer:  
ALEXANDRA BOUNIA, *Professor of Museology* - University of the Aegean, Greece

SESSION II 15:45 – 17.15

### UNPACKING DECOLONIZATION – THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

- ◆ Moderator:  
CIRAJ RASSOOL, *Senior Professor of History* - University of the Western Cape, South Africa
- ◆ Panel members:
  - JESMAEL MATAGA, *Head of the School of Humanities* - Sol Plaatje University, South Africa
  - MARÍA IÑIGO CLAVO, *Professor* - Open University of Catalonia, Spain
  - BRUNO BRULON SOARES, *Professor of Museology* - UNIRIO, Brazil
  - BOGANI MKHONZA, *Curator* - UNISA Art Gallery and art collection, South Africa

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## DAY TWO

THURSDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2020

13:30 – 13:40

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

SESSION III 13:40 – 14:30

ART AND THE BODILY ARCHIVE

- ◆ **Moderator:**  
BERNARD AKOI-JACKSON, *Artist and Writer*  
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana
- ◆ **Panel members:**
  - BARBY ASANTE, *Artist, Curator and Educator* - United Kingdom
  - AZU NWAGBOGU, *Founder and Director* - African Artists' Foundation (AAF), Nigeria
  - PATRICIA KAERSENHOUT, *Visual Artist* - the Netherlands

SESSION IV 14:50 – 15:40

BREAKAWAY SESSIONS – DIGGING IN

- ◆ **Moderator:**  
MEDEE RALL, *Director* - Centre for Extra-Mural Studies - University of Cape Town, South Africa

I Creating networks  
– sharing knowledge

- ◆ **Room host:** CLAUDIA PORTO  
*Museologist - Digital Preservation*  
Department of the Congress, Brazil

II Using new collecting strategies to  
fill the gaps in colonial collections

- ◆ **Room host:** LEEN BEYERS  
*Curator and Head of Research*  
- MAS, Belgium

III The colonial collection  
on trial – the falling statues

- ◆ **Room host:** STEVEN KOTZE  
*Curator* - Durban Local  
History Museums, South Africa

SESSION V 15:50 – 17:30

DECOLONIZATION AS A VERB – GETTING PRACTICAL

- ◆ **Moderator:**  
BONGANI NDHLOVU, *Executive Director Core Functions* - Iziko Museums, South Africa
- ◆ **Panel members:**
  - RANDIE MACDONALD, *Director of Decolonizing Initiatives* - San Diego Museum of Us, United States of America
  - LAURA VAN BROEKHOVEN, *Director* - Pitt Rivers Museum, United Kingdom
  - FLOWER MANASE, *Curator of History* - National Museum of Tanzania, Tanzania
  - JÉRÉMIE MICHAEL MCGOWAN, *Designer and Changemaker*, Norway

FINAL WORDS

17:30 – 17:40



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## Biographies

### Speakers

ACHILLE MBEMBE is a Cameroonian philosopher, political scientist, and public intellectual. Mbembe is a Research Professor of History and Politics at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research in Johannesburg, South Africa and a Visiting Professor in the Department of Romance Studies at the Franklin Humanities Institute, Duke University. He is especially interested in the emergence of “Afro-cosmopolitan culture,” together with the artistic practices that are associated with it. In *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe attempts to renew and reinterpret our understanding of power and subjectivity in contemporary Africa and to subvert some key assumptions of postcolonial theory.

JESMAEL MATAGA is the Head of the School of Humanities at Sol Plaatje University, in Kimberley, South Africa. He completed his PhD in African Studies with specialization in Heritage and Public Culture at the University of Cape Town. Prof. Mataga has experience in research and training in heritage management on the African continent with considerable experience in museum curation, intangible cultural heritage and cultural diversity. He worked for the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) and taught at the University of Zimbabwe and at the National University of Lesotho. His current research, situated in the emerging focus on critical and decolonial heritage, explores the role and place of communities in heritage management. His work aims to support innovation in heritage management practice, which addresses the critical challenges of our time, such as poverty, inequality, conflict, decolonization, migration and social justice.

MARÍA IÑIGO CLAVO is a researcher, curator, and artist with a PhD in Fine Arts. She is a professor at the Open University of Catalonia and co-founder of the independent research group “Peninsula: Colonial processes and artistic and curatorial practices”, in collaboration with Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia. Her research focuses on colonial power relationships, museum and gallery studies, and art in Latin America with special attention to Brazil. She was a researcher for the AHRC project “Meeting Margins: Transnational Art in Europe and Latin America 1950–1978,” at University of Essex and University of the Arts London.



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### Speakers, cont.

BRUNO BRULON SOARES is Professor of Museology at Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO) and professor in the Post-Graduate Program in Museology and Heritage in Brazil. He was coordinator of the Course of Museology at UNIRIO between 2014 and 2016, and currently he coordinates the Research Group Experimental Museology and Image (MEI). Soares has been Vice-Chair of the International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) since 2013. Between 2014 and 2019 he has coordinated the Project History of Museology, an ICOFOM project with the support of UNIRIO, and several other universities throughout the world. He is currently ICOFOM Chair, and he coordinates the Special Project Museums, community action and decolonization.

BONGANI MKHONZA has been working as a Curator for the UNISA Art Gallery and art collection for eleven years. He completed his Doctorate Degree in Art and Philosophy in 2020. Prior to that Mkhonza worked as an Educational Officer for the Durban Art Gallery, in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province, South Africa. His curatorial experience includes a variety of operational planning, budgeting, management, coordinating, and administrative duties for the Gallery and art collection. Bongani has curated art exhibitions nationally in South Africa and travelled some of the exhibitions internationally to countries like Austria, and Serbia in Eastern Europe. His research interests are on decolonizing the university art collections and cultural policies. In his capacity as a Curator, he maintains and reports on a broad spectrum of advisory and acquisition committees. Bongani has also produced catalogues for international exhibitions and the UNISA art collection. In his professional career that spans over 20 years, Bongani has been committed to working in a field that promotes South African contemporary art.

BARBY ASANTE is an artist, curator, educator, occasional DJ and healer in training. Her practice is concerned with the politics of place, space and the ever present histories and legacies of slavery and colonialism. With a deep interest in black feminist and decolonial methodologies, Asante employs strategies of collective writing, re-enactment and creating spaces for transformation, ritual and healing. She embeds within her work notions of collective study, ways of knowing and dialogical practices that embrace being together and breathing together. Asante has taught in fine art programs in London, Berlin, Gothenburg and Rotterdam. Her recent exhibitions and projects include: *As Always a Painful Declaration of Independence: For Ama. For Aba. For Charlotte and Adjoa* Diaspora Pavillion, Venice, 2017, *BALTIC*, Gateshead 2019, *Bergen Kusthall 2020: Black Togetherness as Lingua Franca with Amal Alhaag, Framer Framed, Amsterdam, 198* Contemporary Arts and Learning, 2018; *Baldwin's Nigger RELOADED*, InIVA, London, 2014, *Somerset House, London 2019*. Barby Asante is a PhD Candidate within Centre for Research in Education, Arts and Media (CREAM) at the University of Westminster.

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### Speakers, cont.

AZU NWAGBOGU is the Founder and Director of African Artists' Foundation (AAF), a non-profit organisation based in Lagos, Nigeria. He was appointed as the Interim Director/ Head Curator of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art in South Africa from June 2018 to August 2019 and also serves as Founder and Director of Lagos Photo Festival, an annual international arts festival of photography held in Lagos. Nwagbogu is the publisher of Art Base Africa, a virtual space to discover and learn about contemporary art from Africa and its diasporas. Azu Nwagbogu is also a curator with a special interest in future museology. Some of his past publications include: Dey Your Lane (Lagos Variations), African Under the Prism, AMC Issue 10 (LagosPhoto 2014).

PATRICIA KAERSENHOUT researches hidden and forgotten stories, in a body of work that unfolds as an artistic search for the meaning of invisibility resulting from the African diaspora and colonialism. Her work embodies the paradox of wanting to visualize the unseen and to allow the undefinable. The subjects Kaersenhout researches deal with the position of Black women in relation to sexuality, slavery, colonialism and racism. Her artistic practice has long been inspired by Black activism, a mission she passionately identifies herself with. It is not only the legacy of the Dutch colonial period that is important for her work, she also addresses current developments associated with migrants from Africa. Within her work she investigates decolonial aesthetics that questions why, within Western aesthetics, categories such as beauty and representation have dominated discussions about art and its value. "To what extent do these categories determine how we feel about ourselves; white or black, high or low, strong or weak, good or bad." (Walter Mignolo). Kaersenhout, herself from Surinamese descent, works across a wide range of media, and often collaborates with others, presenting performances and public art projects as well as studio work. The reception of her work coincides with a political wave of emancipation among younger activists and artists of colour worldwide, and where the response is more and more one of recognition.

Patricia Kaersenhout has exhibited and performed widely, for example in 2020 at Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht (NL), Kunstverein Braunschweig (DE), Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz (DE); in 2019 at De Appel, Amsterdam (NL) and The National Art Gallery of the Bahama's; in 2017-2018 Manifesta 12 in Palermo (IT), Prospect 4, New Orleans (US), Savvy Contemporary Berlin (DE) and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (NL); 2014 Biennale of Dakar (SN). In 2021 she will show again at Savvy, New Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (RU) and Palais de Tokyo, Paris (FR).



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### Speakers, cont.

BRANDIE MACDONALD is an Indigenous citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, with ancestral ties to the Choctaw Nation. Brandie currently works as the Director of Decolonizing Initiatives at the San Diego Museum of Man, which resides on the Indigenous ancestral homeland of Kumeyaay peoples. Brandie's work focuses on the application of anti-colonial and decolonial methodology in museums; an approach which focuses on truth-telling, accountability, repatriation, restitution, and the development of systems that address colonial legacy, structural racism, and inequitable practices. Prior to joining the Museum staff in 2017, Brandie managed First Peoples Fund's Indigenous Youth Leadership initiatives and the Arts and Economic Capacity Building initiatives on Indigenous reservations nationally. Brandie received her BA in Applied Anthropology at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, a MEd in International Higher Education at Loyola University, Chicago, and is a PhD student in Education Studies at University of California, San Diego. She was a Salzburg Global Seminar Fellow, an American Alliance of Museums Nancy Hanks Award for Professional Excellent recipient and Diversity Fellow, and a Smithsonian Affiliate Fellow.

LAURA VAN BROEKHOVEN is the Director of the Pitt Rivers Museum. She holds a Professorial Fellowship at Linacre College, and is associated with the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at Oxford. Previously she led the curatorial department of the National Museum of World Cultures (Amsterdam, Leiden and Berg en Dal) and was a lecturer in archaeology, museum studies and indigenous heritage at the Faculty of Archaeology at Leiden University. She currently serves on numerous advisory boards and panels, is a member of the Women Leaders in Museums Network (WLMN) and sits on the European Ethnographic Museum Directors Group. She was a participant in the Getty's Museum Leadership Institute, co-chair of the Oxford and Colonialism Network, and a founding member of Wayeb.

FLOWER MANASE is the Curator of History at the National Museum of Tanzania, a position she has held since 2009. Manase has worked in several projects related to German colonialism in East Africa. She was a co-curator of the Tanzanian chapter of the project Remix: Afrika in Translation organized by the University of Bayreuth. She also participated in making the catalogue for the exhibition German Colonialism: Fragments Past and Present of the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin (DHM). Since 2017, she has been part of the Tanzanian team working on Maji Maji war booty collections at the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin. She is currently the main curator of the permanent exhibition on the History of Tanzania that will be exhibited at the National Museum of Tanzania in Dar es Salaam.





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### Speakers, cont.

JÉRÉMIE MCGOWAN (PhD) is a designer, changemaker+ punk rock bass player based in Romsa/Tromsø, Sápmi/Northern Norway. He directed Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum from 2016-2019, advocating radical change and decolonization with a focus on state/indigenous (Sámi) histories, politics and epistemologies in the Nordics. His experimental approach merges speculative design practice with critical theory in a bid to productively reimagine and remake the museum as a tool for fabulation and a platform for social change. He has an international background in making, teaching, research and curating, and sometimes remembers he has a PhD in art history and theory.

### Moderators

ALEXANDRA BOUNIA is a Professor of Museology at the University of the Aegean in Greece. Between 2019-2020 she held the position of Degree Director for the MA Course in Museum and Gallery Practice in UCL Qatar. Alexandra studied Archaeology and History of Art at the University of Athens (Greece) and Museology at the University of Leicester (UK). Her research interests focus on the history, theory and management of collections and museums, museum ethics, museum sustainability, the role of museums in dealing with difficult and political issues. She has also served as the Chair of the Hellenic Committee of ICOM (2016-2018), as well as the Board's Executive Secretary (2012-2016).

CIRAJ RASSOOL is Senior Professor of History at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and directs the Remaking Societies, Remaking Persons Supranational Forum. He directed the African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies at UWC for 15 years. Among his latest publications are *Unsettled History: Making South African Public Pasts* (Ann Arbor, 2017), written with Leslie Witz and Gary Minkley; and *Missing and Missed: Subject, Politics, Memorialisation* (published as *Kronos: southern African histories*, 44, 2018), co-edited with Nicky Rousseau and Riedwaan Moosage. He was on the boards of the District Six Museum and Iziko Museums of South Africa, as well as of the South African Heritage Resources Agency and the National Heritage Council. He has previously chaired the Scientific Committee of the International Council of African Museums (AFRICOM), and is a member of the Scientific Advisory Board for the study of the Physical Anthropology Collection 'Felix von Luschan' at the Museum of Ethnology at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany.



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### Moderators cont.

BERNARD AKOI-JACKSON (PhD), is a Ghanaian artist who lives and works from Tema/Accra/Kumasi. His multi-disciplinary, audience-implicating installations and performative “pseudo-rituals”, have featured in exhibitions like *An Age of Our Own Making (Reflection II)*, Roskilde, Denmark, (2016); *Silence Between The Lines*, Kumasi, Ghana (2015), *Material Effects*, East Lansing, USA (2015), *WATA don PASS: Looking West*, Lagos and Malmö, Sweden (2015) and *Time, Trade and Travel*, Amsterdam and Accra, Ghana (2012 and 2013). He has curated exhibitions with *blaxTARLINES KUMASI*, prominent being *Cornfields* in Accra, (2016) and *Orderly Disorderly*, (2017). He curated the inaugural exhibition: “*Galle Winston Kofi Dawson: In Pursuit of something ‘Beautiful’, perhaps...*” at the Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art (SCCA) in Tamale, Ghana. Akoi-Jackson is a member of the Exit Frame Collective. He co-curated the newly established Stellenbosch Triennale (February 2020). Bernard Akoi-Jackson holds a PhD in Painting and Sculpture from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi where he lectures with particular interest in disruption and the revolutionary potential in contemporary art practice.

BONGANI NDHLOVU has a PhD in history from the University of the Western Cape. He works as the Executive Director: Core Functions at Iziko Museums of South Africa and serves as Vice-President of SAMA. Ndhlovu has extensive experience in heritage sector.

MEDEE RALL holds a MA and a PhD with a focus on museums. Her PhD focuses on the representation of the San in museum display. She is the Director of the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies at the University of Cape Town.



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## Breakaway Session Hosts

CLAUDIA PORTO holds a degree in Museology (UNIRIO), a postgraduate degree in Conservation of Works of Art (Università Internazionale dell'Arte) and an MBA in Entrepreneurship Management (UFRJ). Since 2019, she co-ordinates the global online festival MuseumWeek in Brazil. She works as a public servant at the Congress of Brazil, in the Digital Preservation Department; teaches Social Media Strategies at the MBA Museums Management (UCAM/ABCG); and also works as a museums independent consultant on digital communication and social media. For 10 years, she ran a web content studio with clients such as AOL Brazil. Former Arts and Exchange co-ordinator at the British Council and former director of Casa da Marquesa de Santos museum. Claudia and a partner brought to Brazil the international initiatives #DrinkingaboutMuseums and #MuseumsShowoff, ran from 2014 to 2016 in various capitals. She is a member of COMCOL/ICOM; of ICOM Strategic Plan Standing Committee; and Counsellor at ICOM National Committee Brazil.

LEEN BEYERS is head of the curatorial department of the MAS, which displays, researches and updates the MAS collection of 500,000 objects of history, art and culture associated with the city and port of Antwerp, with overseas shipping and maritime trade and with Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Oceania. She has a PhD in history and a MA in anthropology. Her expertise as researcher and curator mainly relates to urban history, food culture, migration, oral history and memory, and museum management.

STEVEN KOTZE has an MA in History of Art, with a focus on representations of gender in South African museum exhibitions. Since 1997 he has worked in the field of museums, public history and heritage, and has assisted municipal authorities in South Africa to develop historical and cultural tourism policy. Steven has published two books and numerous articles on heritage and has worked as a researcher and curator at Durban's Local History Museum since 2013.

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### Organisations

COMCOL is an International Committee of ICOM which aims to deepen discussions, and share knowledge on the practice, theory and ethics of collecting and collections (both tangible and intangible) development. COMCOL is a platform for professional exchange of views and experiences around collecting in the broadest sense. The mandate includes: collecting and de-accessioning policies; contemporary collecting; restitution of cultural property; digital collecting; and respectful practices that affect the role of collections now and in the future, from all types of museums and from all parts of the world.

COMCOL's aims are to increase cooperation and collaboration across international boundaries, to foster innovation in museums and to encourage and support museum professionals in their work with collections development. COMCOL organises annual meetings and working groups and engages its members in dialogue through the COMCOL newsletter.



**Website** <http://comcol.mini.icom.museum/>  
**Email** [comcol.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:comcol.secretary@gmail.com)

ICOM-SA represents the International Council of Museums in South Africa, being one of 119 National Committees of ICOM. It is dedicated to providing support to South African museum professionals in integrating with the ICOM network and its resources, as well as addressing common issues of museum practice in South Africa.



**Website** <http://icom-south-africa.mini.icom.museum/>  
**Email** [icomsamuseums@gmail.com](mailto:icomsamuseums@gmail.com)

THE SOUTH AFRICAN MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION (SAMA) is a professional association which aims to promote museums, museology and the museum profession in South Africa. Established in 1936, it strives to protect, manage and create awareness of the cultural and natural heritage of all South Africans.



**Website** <https://samuseums.co.za/>  
**Email** [samuseums@gmail.com](mailto:samuseums@gmail.com)