

## Museum Collaboration Manifesto

After working in museums for many years, we continue to see objects in collections disguised with mistaken and unsuitable interpretations. With so much error, many items gain false meaning and significance by the hand of outdated standards and practice. It is strange enough that objects separate from their local setting and context, now they are renamed and reframed in languages and systems foreign to the place and people from which they were born. How can these collections cultivate relationships and create more informed citizenry when crucial conversations about the stewardship and significance of the objects have not begun?

We are now finally witnesses to efforts that improve staid systems of museum classification, curation, and accountability. Let us bury the fit-in-a-box orthodoxy of one structured and established system of classifying objects and archival materials. The current system is not even binary. It is not two systems; with one recognizing the other, it is one system. Moreover, we will say this - no one has a right to restrict what we name or label this thing or that.

The inclusion of expert peoples representing the source of collection objects is the keystone of a collaborative movement. Listening to and respecting the makers and users of the objects does not change the objects. Why must we even explain? Has a museum or archive ever created objects in their collections?

In the spirit of trust and good faith, we will advocate for pure and virtuous collaboration among museums and source communities. The idea of collaboration is a higher order than many may be concerned with and implies that collaboration involves reaching out and enlightening on equal terms: to decentralize power and leadership and share authority. We do not need to oppose each other; instead, we will enable one another and allow objects and people to speak. Through pure collaborative spirit, we will pay tribute to the voices of objects, as the objects should be perceived and understood.

Many conventions in museum collection management, lexicon, and conservation have lost their purpose. If the field of museology is genuinely egalitarian and moving forward, then there must be centrifugal answers to our problems. We will labor, *co-labor*, and *co-elaborate* from the fixed center. We are aware knowledges, plural, are transitory and fluid, and the old systems supporting only one way of knowing are themselves artifacts of humanity's misstep.

In addition to the need for collections and curatorial work to move in positive collaborative directions, a new museum conservation dialogue has emerged. In some situations, let us marvel at the beauty of aging objects. In collaboration with the desires of source communities and makers of items, we will respect that some objects should fulfill their lifetimes as naturally as possible. As we are fascinated with the age and seasoning of buildings and other structures, we can honor the aging of some objects in collections. In this sense, some objects should reclaim their destinies as defined by the makers and their communities. Together we will pay tribute to the creative, the impalpable nature, and the spiritual dynamics of these objects and appreciate appropriate science and competence of museum conservation as art.

We believe the spirit of *true collaboration* is a movement, and the number of colleagues that are attaining true collaboration is additive and promising. These colleagues' works are principled and noble, and we applaud them and everyone associated with their ideas.

We have many years of experience, we are capable and sincere people, and we are thinking differently from those that served before us. Surely, imaginative and unfamiliar concepts will meet resistance. However, when the tide goes out, we will trust heretical notions as positive beacons that will enlighten the field of museology and manifest new accountability of all knowledges through true collaboration.

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