

Stories and their Tellers: Curating living knowledge in the museum toward a decolonized, gender just future

International Gathering, 3rd – 5th June, Birkbeck, University of London

For millennia, humans have told stories to give structure, purpose and meaning to their experiences and deeds. As critical knowledge producing and enculturating forces stories teach people who they were, who they are and who they might become. Just as stories are important, so too are their tellers and one of society's most pervasive and influential storytellers is museums. Through objects, artefacts, texts, exhibitions, visuals and other educational activities museums story the world's canvas with the most important historical and contemporary figures and social, political, cultural, aesthetic, and scientific events, innovations, and thinking. Yet museum stories, like all stories, are never neutral nor impartial because relations of power are always in play. For every story told in the museum countless others have been kept silent and this silence is highly gendered. Museum stories have systematically exalted heteronormative masculinities and excluded or misrepresented women -- lesbian, trans, heterosexual, disabled, Indigenous, and racially minorized women -- which has denied them the same sense of history, identity and agency.

Yet across the globe feminist scholars, practitioners, curators and educators working in and with museums are telling very different tales to intersect with wider institutionalizations and structures of meaning and power. Their central aim is to (re)educate by storying histories, voices, deeds, knowledge and experiences long denied a public audience and intellectual credibility. From 3rd to the 5th of June 2024, a group of 15 of these feminists will come together at Birkbeck, University in London to share practices of gathering, assembling, curating and performing stories and consider their educational potential and contributions to a more decolonised, gender just future. The questions that inform this gathering include: How does storytelling different truths about history and the present disrupt hetero-patriarchal colonial norms? How do our stories break boundaries of what can be known, thought, and done? How do our stories address epistemic injustice? What new memories, living knowledges and actions does our work encourage or enable?

We are delighted that some of the attendees will be coming to the LHBN meeting at Northumbria to deliver a session on storytelling and lead an optional workshop on the practice of metissage. We will share more information about this closer to the time.