

DECOLONIZING THE MUSEUM

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This review portrays a curatorial perspective of a two days' workshop initiated by Yvette Mutumba, a guest faculty from museum der Weltkulturen and Contemporary And to explore a theme of "Decolonizing the Museum" at Goethe Zentrum Kampala from 20th-21st June 2017. The workshop engaged institutional stakeholders From Makerere University, Uganda museum, public, art residencies and independent studios. While artists sought to redefine the concept of African museums in relation to decolonization ideology, they were still lost in a mist of frustration wondering whether their colonial past needed to be altered or renewed to gain a glimpse into the decolonization processes.

A review

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DECOLONIZING THE MUSEUM

Curatorial review of a two days' workshop under the theme of "Decolonizing the Museum" by Yvette Mutumba, hosted by Goethe Zentrum Kampala from 20th-21st June 2017.

Can Uganda museums shift their focus from material collections to creating contemporary narratives? Whether the future and relevance of these institutions to the public depends on this notion or not is an initiative that requires continuous dialogue. However, with great consideration to growing concerns and focus on feminism, queer activism and cultural idealism, museums stand a test of reconsidering possibilities of abandoning principles of coloniality and modernity if they're to curb European satisfaction at the cost of African cultural interests. It's such an interrogation that sought dialogue to redefine the concept of museums within an African context that witnessed a two days' workshop titled "Decolonizing the Museum".

Commencing with Yvette Mutumba's powerful presentation laced with curatorial rhetoric of cultural idealism rooted from African context within Weltkulturen Museum (Museum of World Cultures), the first day of the workshop witnessed an inundation of academic folks from Makerere University and Uganda Museum. With no intention to disrepute presence of artists, curators and the entire arts fraternity, a scholarly surge of presence in the workshop by Makerere University lecturers froze several moments and attracted coy smiles in admiration of new developments. Although their presence was transitory to witness the exciting final day of the workshop, a deferment of their presentation to the final day was greeted with scattered representation that patiently lurked in crowds to a presentation that never came to fruition. Presenting her prolific practice, Yvette's curatorial experience displayed a number of curatorial experimentation and exploration of risks and decisions of merging museum curatorial ingenuity, African artistic creativity with non-conventional artistic professions to interrogate, transform and communicate contemporary narratives around existing ethnographic collections. This presentation engineered dialogue and offered points of reference for the rest of the workshop. Although never articulated any form of reframing colonial confrontations as it steered towards full conceptualisation of relations between spaces and politics of decolonization, the workshop rather seemed an advocate of relational approaches to ethnographic collections. The final presentations of the day by Fred Mutebi and Samson Ssenkaaba aka Xenson proposed a very unconventional approach to cultural narratives. While Fred sought to vanish academic boundaries in an effort to front community involvement in production of bark cloth "Olubugo" narratives to existing ethnographic material, his presentation exhibited a wealth of memories and a heritage practice punctuated with native customs, proverbs and histories, as he insisted, "Lule Sonko of Ngonge clan discovered Olubugo 700 years ago, yet he remains undocumented and less celebrated to date". His practical experience ushered participants into Xenson's presentation of a personal collection of works that climaxed the day with portrayal of a rich rhetoric of poetry and performances whose social reality create places of conviviality to punctual audiences.

The end of day one fashioned words into weapons to defend cultural dignity aimed at an intellectual interrogation into processes of acquisition, preservation, research and communication of museum collections in preparation of participants for a thrilling guided tour of the Uganda National Museum by Adebo Nelson in an opening session at the second day of the workshop. Unpacking a century of cultural memories to what he might have examined as a gullible audience in the second session at Goethe institute, Asiimwe Richard a museum conservator received a heavily heated controversial debate around his national museum presentation from critical artists lurking in ideological evaluation of a catch split opportunity to interrogate his intellectual ingenuity towards the collection context. His failure to drape hard realities in auspicious rhetoric, coupled by intellectual inferiority in rendering brevity a servant of justice exposed his inaccurately discorded formal and contextual analysis to open criticism during group presentations towards the end of the workshop. Artists seemed dismayed at how institutional bureaucracies had enslaved its cultural managers in ideological confines of powerlessness to critically engage collections in context of geographical and geopolitical dialogue. They had truly been victimized by self-inflicted psychological defeat to an extent of ignoring issues of content deficiency within collections, a weakness that shockingly sent cultural audiences into tailspin.

In conclusion, artists within their respective groups collectively identified with ideas of reactivating cultural heritage institutions, and thus raised a number of concerns among which demanding for a cultural ministry that will grant autonomy to cultural institutions took priority in addressing financial inefficiencies. Despite excessive bureaucratic processes, artists in a brainstorming evening session pledged active contribution towards the museum when it decides to embrace a non-exclusive participation policy that would encourage employees to participate in art activities and events beyond museum vicinity. Although artists raised concerns towards museum employment policies in relation to quality and motivation of employees, they still promised, in partnership with Goethe Zentrum Kampala to initiate a project that will redefine and promote the Uganda Museum as a step towards creating contemporary narratives to champion processes of decolonization.