

Representing Identity: Time for Radical Change

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Over the past year, we have been analyzing Master's Thesis and Doctoral Theses that explore the role of identity in museum practice.

The studies offered incredible insights into how we can truly radically reimagine our field and make our institutions diverse, equitable, and welcoming places to be. They've also, sadly, been a testament to what our field loses through its resistance to true, structural change, through the people who've been forced out of their specialties or even museum work by tokenism, discrimination, low pay and lack of work, and student debt.

This small sample of quotes from the theses and the interviews honors the research and the ideas of the authors who might be participating in this conference, and those who left the field or who could not afford to participate in this important but costly conference.

The theses quoted here are listed in the handout.

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When it comes to privilege you have to give up some of that privilege to lift others up.

"This is not comfortable for anybody regardless of your background and just using the comfort factor as an excuse for everything is just not good enough."

"Museums, seemingly un-moveable, are moveable."

People in power have very little understanding of the struggles people of color have to go through and what hurdles we have to go through.

"How can museums challenge and discomfort themselves in a way that hits that crucial sweet-spot between social justice and museological practice?"

That made me fall in love with this weird thing called the museum field.

"I want to drill mirrors into museum walls, so that everyone can see himself or herself reflected in the institution."

"You have to pay people what they're worth."

I see my white colleagues that have the privilege to work on Black culture or Hispanic culture or Native American culture. ...

But I know very few people of color are in those positions where they have the privilege to work on anybody else's culture or history.

I came to this work by way of realizing how influential the museum can be, and how we, this generation of museum professionals, are at the cusp of a new chapter of inclusivity and sensitivity around gender and sexuality.

I think we have to destroy the museums in order to build them back up

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