



Obliterate

Call for Abstracts

“it is about time that we questioned the fundamental basis of the situation and ‘killed’ - I repeat, killed – the Western model of the museum in Africa in order for new methods for the conservation and promotion of our heritage to flourish.”

(Alpha Oumar Konaré, former president of ICOM)

Between academics, cultural practitioners, and museum professionals there has for a long time been a consensus that ‘the museum’, as an inherited colonial institution, built on the spoils of Empires and Western philosophy and systems of knowledge, is an outdated structure for the keeping and safeguarding of ‘universal truths’ and particular ‘wonders of the world’. A critique especially directed towards the classical ethnographic museums, often renamed, and redefined as museums of cultural history, or world culture museums.

To overcome the multiplicity/complexity of the problem, different solutions and interventions have been advocated and outlined. From everything and between ideology to practice, such as ideas and policies of restitution by repatriation (Sarr and Savoy 2018); the writing of *necrographies* of objects (Hicks 2020); the rethinking of the museum as a space of care (<https://takingcareproject.eu/about>); efforts of *remediation* in the *post-ethnographic* museum by way of field work in the museum itself (Deliss 2020); or even working towards an open-source museum where collections will be available for all.

However, much of the postcolonial critique of the museum, is also framed within western academic traditions of thought, while at the same time, researchers from various disciplines, often justify the need for old museum collections for their new and innovative scientific studies.

Despite a proliferation of new museums post-liberation, or of museums transforming (often more than once), in southern Africa these cultural institutions fail to gain traction, are poorly

funded and seem to exist primarily for foreign tourism. Some have gone as far as to argue that the neglect of museums by government is an intentional act of dismantling, a way to in fact kill the Western model of a museum.

In the workshop *Obliterate*, held at the Origins Centre (Johannesburg), 7-8 September 2023 we ask how we can engage in *new methods* of making the museum relevant to African realities today? The title implies intentional erasure, as well as the slow disappearance of something due to age. In the first instance things are destroyed, while in the second, obliteration gives rise to something new. The question remains what do we salvage and how? And how do we begin to let go and rebuild? Should a museum still be a place for knowledge, wonder and inspiration, and if so, can we imagine that place to be radically different from an African perspective?

We invite scholars and students, practitioners and professionals who work with, or are interested in the public dissemination of African pasts and African presents within a broad concept of 'the museum'. We encourage contributions that consider, explore, explain, challenge, suggest, or imagine new ways into the museum – from theoretical, practical, educational, curatorial or artistic points of view. Contributions can take the form of paper presentations, posters, recordings, re-enactments, mini-exhibitions, performance, or any other form of appropriate expression (the workshop will be held in a fairly large room within a museum building). Prospect contributors should feel free to contact the organizers to discuss an idea.

Please submit a **300 word abstract, or proposal by 15 January 2023**. For everyone to be able to engage in each other's work in the best way possible, we encourage the pre-circulation of papers one month before the workshop.

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