



Rethinking approaches to museum practices: why people matter

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Reflecting upon the title of this conference “Art Bio Matters”, this dialog engages a shift in focus to consider “Why people matter.” As institutions, museums have wielded tremendous cultural and educational authority. This authority is currently undergoing a transformation of historical proportion. At the international level, many museums are now publicly acknowledging their own colonial legacies and questioning long-term institutional practices. These practices have created barriers between collections and source communities, sovereign Nations, and peoples who do not view museum collections and cultural materials as “objects” or “things”, but as ancestors, relatives, representatives of kinship systems and ties to homelands. Acknowledging this fraught history is a key first step to establishing reciprocal and ethical practices in our field. But what are the next steps? And how do we restructure existing systems to effectively partner with communities?

As the so-called “experts” within, we are privileged with making the key decisions regarding how cultural heritage is interpreted and preserved, and what knowledge inherent to or generated from the collection is worthy of public consumption. This conversation will highlight some practical methods and approaches that the speakers have incorporated into their work, in order to establish respectful, practical, and sustainable relationships for reconnecting museum collections with their source communities.