Decolonizing in Collections Care

Connecting to Collections Care
November 16, 2023
The Museum of Us recognizes that it has the privilege to reside, and operate, on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Kumeyaay Nation-the Indigenous People of this area.

Kumeyaay Peoples have lived in this area since time immemorial. The Kumeyaay Nation maintain their political sovereignty, practice and cultural traditions, and are the stewards of the land.
Balboa Park & World’s Fair Legacy

Balboa Park, 1915

Hopi “Indian Village” or “Painted Desert”, Balboa Park, ca. 1915
The Science of Man exhibition was a series of five sections concerning: Man’s Evolution, Man’s Development and Growth, Man’s Variation (Races of Man), Man’s Decline (Death), and Modern Anthropology.

In Hrdlička’s own words “...the three principal races of this country, [are] namely the ‘thorough-bred' white American (at least three generations American on one parental side), the Indian, and the full-blood American negro.”

– Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, Vol. 1, 1915
Collecting History

Over 100 cultural heritage items were procured by Museum of Man Curators and Researchers, who were also members of the Stanley Porteus expeditions in the Kimberley District, Western and Central Australia, in 1929.

- Researchers measured Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders heads and other body parts, collected data about lifeways and social structure, and marked their territory boundaries.

- Porteus studied Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islanders communities to bolster his white supremacist racial theories.
Footprint of the Museum

- More than 75,000 ethnographic objects
- More than 700 archeological sites
- Over 7,500 ancestral remains
- More than 100,000 images and 300 liner feet of archival material
- More than 150 Indigenous communities represented within the United States
- More than 200 Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities represented internationally
Decolonizing Initiatives Guiding Principles

**Truth telling & Accountability**
- Actively practice truth-telling and accountability about the Museum’s colonial legacy and ways they replicate colonial practices and thought

**Ownership**
- Honoring Indigenous ownership to their material culture and intellectual property
- Repatriation: tangible and intangible

**Changing Systems & Policies**
- Language, practices, and policies
- Prioritizing, centering and honoring Indigenous voices, knowledge, and requests

**Inclusion & Representation**
- Recognize and honor Indigenous authority
- Indigenous representation at all levels of decision making

**Reciprocity**
- Share this information in the same spirit from which it was shared with us *only with Indigenous consent*
- Museum doesn’t own Indigenous knowledge
Indigenous peoples appeal for decolonial change & justice globally

Museum Looked Internally:
Reviewed own colonial history & present colonial actions (archives, collecting process, access, exhibits, etc.)

Honored & Listened:
To Indigenous peoples & Indigenous Scholars expertise to identify what needed to change

Action:
Changed organizational language.
Artifact --> Item
Specimen --> Ancestor, Human Remain
Collections --> Cultural Resources

Policy & Structure:
- Human Remains Policy
- Colonial Pathways Policy (curation/repatriation)
- Decolonizing Initiatives Department / Director
- Public statement & commitment

Internal Working Group:
Decolonizing Initiative
Working Group developed (staff, board members, & Indigenous community members)

Action:
Curation & Stewardship of Cultural Resources

Action:
Repatriation & restitution

Action:
Exhibit reframe / refresh

Action:
Cultural Resources Management Policy changed: Indigenous consultations, stewardship, access, & repatriation

Action:
Reflection, restructure, & governance

Action:
Indigenous consultations
Systemic Change Models

[Circular diagram with terms such as Accountability & Truth-Telling, Visitor Experiences, Education, Human Resources, Finance, Development, Governance and the Board of Trustees, Indigenous Representation, Decolonizing Initiatives, and Operational Processes like Operations, External Communications, and Reciprocity.

Venn diagram showing the intersection of Policy and Practice, labeled Sustainable Systemic Change.

Museum of Us
All of us.
Colonial Pathways Policy

- “MoU [SDMoM] will accession and/or curate Indigenous cultural resources only in instances where it has documented consent to do so from the Indigenous community, or when it can demonstrate that the cultural resource left an Indigenous community through a decolonized pathway; and...”

- "MoU [SDMoM] will only serve as the steward for Indigenous cultural resources currently held at the Museum that cannot be used for interpretation at the request of a descendant community."

- “Additionally, Indigenous communities’ needs for their belongings change over time, based upon many factors related to the ongoing legacies of colonization. Therefore, any cultural resource that an Indigenous community has determined constitutes matrimony/patrimony, and belongs with that community, shall be eligible for return under this policy...”

What is a Colonial Pathway?

- Inequitable trade
- A period of economic hardship, community unrest, or armed conflict, any period of time when:
  - cultural practices were under heavy persecution and/or colonization
  - removed, taken or purchased during military activities:
- Removed without consultation or consent
- Acquired through expedition, exploration, or exploitation
- Maintaining ownership when cultural revitalization is dependent upon repatriation
Kumeyaay Nation

IMLS-I: Community Anchors Grant in partnership with the Kumeyaay Nation

Object name updates in database

Controlled Object Name

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Controlled Object Name</th>
<th>Object Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basket</td>
<td>Please</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Object Name

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object Name</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A-k-ma-ur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quail Egg Basket</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kumeyaay Community Day

Saturday, May 1, 2021 | 11:00AM - 4:00PM

Haawka Itpal - Itpal
You're invited to connect with Kumeyaay objects, photographs, and audio recordings at the San Diego Museum of Man.

Cultural heritage objects currently on display will be brought out for families to experience at this first-of-its-kind event open only to the Kumeyaay Nation. This free event also includes lunch and traditional singing, story, and games.

While you're visiting, you can also share with us what else you'd like to see happening at the Museum!

I'm a Kumeyaay
I want to experience Kumeyaay culture.
I prefer to receive information via email, phone, or in person at our visitor center.

Museum of Us
All of us.
Our Decolonizing Initiatives in Action:

NOTE—The Museum of Us is currently working in collaboration with the Kumeyaay Nation to create a new exhibit to replace Kumeyaay: Native Californians/lipai-Tipai

With support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Museum is working collaboratively with various Kumeyaay community members, elders, artists, and the Kumeyaay Heritage Preservation Committee leaders to develop plans for a new community-driven exhibit. This two-year project will include the creation of exhibit scripts, programming, and exhibit designs, developed through a Kumeyaay cultural lens and creative vision.

For more information about the IMLS – Community Anchors Grant please visit https://imls.gov/grants/awarded/ma-246346-oms-20, or use the camera on your phone to scan the QR code to be directed automatically to the link.

The Museum’s Commitment:

1) We will prioritize Kumeyaay community voices, realities, and requests when displaying, interpreting, and writing content for the new exhibit interpretive plan.

2) We will engage with Kumeyaay community members in large forum focus groups, one-on-one meetings, and through written evaluations to capture content for the new exhibit that is self-determined by the Kumeyaay community.

3) We will work collaboratively with the Kumeyaay community to ensure that a new exhibit interpretive plan is approved, along with any of the cultural resources displayed, by our

4) We will work in partnership with Kumeyaay stakeholders to develop curriculum to accompany the new exhibit. Curriculum developed will be community-driven and approved by Kumeyaay consultants. Curriculum developed will be community-driven and approved by Kumeyaay consultants.

5) We will recognize Kumeyaay sovereignty and that Kumeyaay knowledge—whether documented or passed through oral traditions—is the correct evidence when defining the importance and use of their cultural...
“The Artifact Piece” by James Luna, 1987
Maasai

Ambassador Ole Senkale

2023 Treatment image pending community approval.
Our Decolonizing Initiatives in Action:

NOTE—The Museum of Us is currently working to change Maya: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth, the outdated exhibit you see before you.

Maya peoples are still here today and thriving, and they continue to maintain their cultural heritage. Yet, this exhibit presents them as a civilization frozen-in-time and a people of the past. The one-sided narrative of the exhibit elevates Euro-American academic perspectives above the voices of the Maya community relative to their past, present and future. We hope to do the opposite.

With support from the Moxie Foundation, the Museum of Us is consulting with Maya community members about the content of the exhibit, and their cultural resources contained within it, so that we can reframe the exhibit with their expert guidance. In this way, the Museum of Us hopes to redress the harm caused by the exhibit's existing portrayal of Maya peoples and our role in perpetuating it.

The Museum’s Commitment:

1) We will work collaboratively with the Maya community to ensure that old exhibit content is replaced with new content, which is approved, along with the cultural resources displayed, by our Maya community consultants.

2) We will prioritize Maya community voices, realities, and requests when displaying, interpreting, and writing content for the revised exhibit.

3) We will recognize Indigenous sovereignty and that Indigenous knowledge—whether documented or passed through oral traditions—is the correct evidence when defining the importance and use of their cultural resources and heritage.
2016 - Present
Museum decolonial practices initiated

2019-2020
Museums grant application and award

2020 - 2021
Cultural Resource Review and consultation

October 2020 - April 2021
2nd decision: consultation

August 2021
2nd decision: consultation

October 2021
2nd temporary display install

February - April 2022
Textile review, consultation, and display selection

May - June 2022
Museum exhibition of work of Memory and Memory

June 15-16, 2022
Textile review with Maya consultants and special guests

November 2022 - present
Exhibit view scripts, handouts, and activity guides content drafting with consultants

October 2022
AMA Inspiration Station presentation

The Future
- More cultural resources access and review.
- Repatriation and consented stewardship implementation,
- Additional programming and educational content creation,
- Future collaborative projects to be determined.

Summer 2020
10 exhibits on the Maya People

2018-2019
"Maya Heart of the Earth, Heart of the Sky" exhibit identified for update and decolonial review.

Spring 2020
- Identify & contract with Maya scholars and knowledge holders.
- Compile cultural resource collection/discovery and documentation for consultant review.

April - June 2021
- 1st consultation round (consultative review)
- 1st temporary display install, with signage

October 2021 - April 2022
- Exhibit content and label consultations and drafting
- Exhibit and display design

February - May 2022
2nd round of review (consultative review)

March - June 2022
3rd consultation (design works and exhibit revision)

June - September 2022
- Maya People: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth exhibit opening.
- Consultation closing meeting

July - December 2022
- Museum internal project documentation
- Museum grant reporting

May 2023
- Cultural resource visit with Maya consultants and special guests

Winter 2023-2024
Lighting mockups

"Weaving the Past and Present" exhibit by Oscar Urbina and Chajman (Maya)
Questions to keep asking ourselves on this decolonial journey

- How do we continue to benefit from the displacement, dispossession, and erasure of Indigenous peoples?

- How have we intentionally and unintentionally perpetuated colonial harm?
  - Who defines the industries "best practices" and "normal"?

- What does truth-telling look like and how can you include it in all of your departments?

- How do we honor Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color's voices, requests, and rights to self-determination in our organization, policy, exhibits, stewardship, curation, etc?

- What are the tangible ways that we can take action and make equitable change in the museum field to redress colonial harm through micro and macro change within administrative and programmatic levels?
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