

NEWS RELEASE

Jill DiSanto
Public Relations Director
215.898.2956
jdisanto@upenn.edu

International Conference Focuses on Decolonization and Future of Cultural Institutions



PHILADELPHIA — In partnership with the **Center for Experimental Ethnography**, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology will host the first international hybrid conference of its kind titled "Settler Colonialism, Slavery, and the Problem of Decolonizing Museums," from October 20-23, 2021. The conference is free and open to the public.

Partially virtual, the conference will also incorporate in-person events during the evenings, specifically designed for the Museum's neighbors across the City of Philadelphia. The evening events will be livestreamed to ensure access for everyone.

The conference will open Wednesday, October 20 at noon, when Dr. Deborah Thomas, the Director of the **Center for Experimental Ethnography** and the R. Jean Brownlee Professor of Anthropology at Penn, and Dr. Christopher Woods, the Williams Director of the **Penn Museum** and the Avalon Professor in the Humanities, will welcome Dr. [Laura Van Broekhoven](#), the Director of the **Pitt Rivers Museum**, to take the stage for the keynote address.

Featuring experts from the world's most notable cultural institutions, "Settler Colonialism, Slavery, and the Problem of Decolonizing Museums" will examine some of the most controversial issues facing ethnographic museums and other cultural institutions today through panel discussions, roundtables, and question-and-answer sessions. These will include discussions about:

- The ongoing impact of imperialism, settler colonization, and slavery on collection and exhibition practices;
- The dynamic relationships between Indigenous dispossession and African slavery globally;
- Creative and meaningful ways to imagine and enact repatriation that build on and move beyond NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act);
- Successful processes of decolonization, Indigenization, anti-racism, and repair.

"With this conference, we seek to build on the critical reconsiderations of ethnographic museums that have been ongoing in North America, Europe, and South Africa," Dr. Thomas stated. "Questions about the relationships between colonialism and collections, the challenges of repatriation, and what restitution and repair might look like are not new. What we are interested in is how we bring the issues facing Indigenous communities into dialogue with the issues facing African and African-descended people globally," she continued. "We especially want to highlight the creative, repair-oriented work that has been happening in many contexts, work from which we might continue to derive inspiration here at Penn."

"The Penn Museum is confronting its own history of colonialism, with institutional actions towards repair," Dr. Woods explains. "Our decolonization work is ongoing, and this conference is an ideal platform for ensuring these efforts continue to involve as many diverse perspectives as possible."

Register for the "Settler Colonialism, Slavery, and the Problem of Decolonizing Museums" [here](#).

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