

DECOLONIZING NATURAL HISTORIES
*Critical and practical perspectives
in museum contexts*

MUSÉUMS D'HISTOIRE NATURELLE
ET DÉCOLONISATION
Expériences et regards critiques

15 - 17 March 2023

Speakers and moderators

Keynote

— Miranda Lowe (Natural History Museum London)

Refreshing the perspectives and practices on people, places and spaces within natural history collections

While decolonisation has been the topic of much recent discussion in museums over the last few years, what does this mean in the context of natural history? Using both UK-based and international case studies Miranda Lowe will examine the practice of decolonising natural science collections and related knowledge that require tracing how specimens and objects were collected, acquired and moved worldwide as well as acknowledging the collaboration of diverse communities in the process. These narratives are commonly absent from the interpretation of natural history collections particularly in relation to colonial histories which will be explored in this talk. The misrepresentation of the past is problematic because it alienates indigenous and black audiences. This talk will also represent and include examples of the participation of a diversity of voices and experiences from networks such as grassroots led network Museum Detox and The MuseumsLab. Acknowledging difficult pasts is an important first step in creating more inclusive and representative interpretation across the natural history arena.

Miranda Lowe, CBE, is principal curator of crustacea at the Natural History Museum in London, a Fellow of The Museums Lab 2022 and a founder member of Museum Detox. In 2020, Miranda was named in BBC Radio Four Women's Hour Power List. Her work links science/art/nature to aid the public understanding of the natural world. Some of her published work discusses how museum collections are connected to colonialism and how to best deal with these difficult histories. She is also Chair of arts & heritage organisation Culture& - opening up who makes and enjoys arts and heritage.

1st panel:

Decolonial thought in contemporary museum practice

—— Sharon Heal (Museums Association London, UK)

Decolonisation in UK museums – challenges, barriers and opportunities.

Britain had one of the world's largest empires and much of its museum infrastructure and collections are a result of its imperial past. UK museums are now facing up to this colonial past and are working with diaspora communities and communities of origin to explore new narratives and new ways of working. This work is against a backdrop of so-called Culture Wars and a hostile government approach in England, whereas in Scotland and Wales governments have taken a more proactive and supportive stance, actively encouraging museums to deal with difficult pasts. Within this complex and contradictory context, the Museums Association has undertaken extensive research into how the sector works with collections and communities and how best to navigate contemporary challenges. Its 2016 Empowering Collections Report centred a proactive approach to the democratisation and decolonisation of collections. The presentation will address the development of the MA's Supporting Decolonisation in Museums guidance; the outcomes and learning from the skills and confidence programme, current practice and what future decolonising initiatives might bring.

Sharon Heal is the director of the Museums Association, chair of the Museum of Homelessness and a trustee of the Thackray and the European Museum Forum.

—— Bruno Brulon Soares (University of St. Andrews, Scotland)

Decolonising as Rehumanising: some Indigenous lessons

This talk will approach museums from the standpoint of the living populations historically excluded from them by proposing an Indigenous perspective to decolonisation as a form of rehumanisation in the post-colonial world. It will first discuss the practice of salvage anthropology and the documenting of the dead which defined the work of early ethnographic museums in the self-defined West. It will then present the case study of a Tupinambá feather cloak that travelled the colonial world and was apprehended to become part of the collection of the National Museum of Denmark in 1916. This particular material testimony of a colonial wound has provoked the reaction of Indigenous activists and artists when facing the cloak in the present. From an Indigenous perspective over this cloak, we can consider a particular view on decolonisation which permits a more nuanced understanding of restitution processes and draws into question the purported objectivity of museum objects.

Bruno Brulon Soares is a museologist and anthropologist from Brazil, and a lecturer in Museum and Heritage Studies at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. His forthcoming book, *The Anticolonial Museum*, explores the rhetoric of decolonisation in museum theory and its political and material consequences in Europe and Latin America. Between 2019 and 2022, he was Chair of the International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) and co-Chair of the Standing Committee for the Museum Definition of ICOM, undertaking a global participatory process to arrive at a new museum definition for this organisation. His research interests have focused on reflexive museology, community-based museums and the political uses of museums and cultural heritage.

—— Moderator: Mathieu Viau-Courville (OCIM)

Mathieu Viau-Courville is director of the Office of Museum Cooperation and Information (OCIM), University of Burgundy/Ministry of Higher Education and Research. For more than 15 years, he has worked in national museums and universities in Canada, Spain, the Netherlands, France and Luxembourg. He also conducted extensive field research in South America, primarily Bolivia and Brazil, and also Spain. At ICOM (International Council of Museums), he serves on the board of Museum International. He is also a member of the judging panel for the European Museum of the Year Award (European Museum Forum/Council of Europe). He received his PhD from the University of East Anglia (UK) in 2011.

2nd Panel:

Collecting past and present: challenges for the future

■ **Ina Heumann** (Museum für Naturkunde Berlin)

Colonial Taxonomies: Natural History and the Power of Collecting

The African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*) has been taxonomically named and described over 30 times. Almost all of these descriptions date back to the decades of German colonial rule and the curator Paul Matschie, under whom the mammal collection at the Berlin Museum of Natural History grew by over 100,000 objects. Starting with taxonomic descriptions of the African wild dog, I show how these excesses of accumulation were possible, what power collecting and collectors had, and how collecting and the military were interrelated. Following this, my talk addresses some fundamental questions about natural history, colonialism, and responsibility.

Dr. Ina Heumann is head of the department Humanities of Nature. Her work focuses on politics of nature, especially on natural history and empire, collecting and violence, the history of extractivism, translocation and appropriation of natural history specimens. She has conceived, fundraised, and headed a number of third-party funded projects, and has published widely on such topics as 'the issue of duplicates'. *The British Journal for the History of Science* 55(3), 257–278 (with A. MacKinney, R. Buschmann); "Promises of mass digitisation and the colonial realities of natural history collections". *The Journal of Natural Science Collections* (forthcoming) (with Katja Kaiser, Tahani Nadim et al); *Deconstructing Dinosaurs: The history of the Tendaguru expedition and its finds, 1906—2022*, Brill (forthcoming) (ed. with Mareike Vennen, Holger Stoecker).

■ **Anne-Gabrielle Wüst-Saucy** (Federal Office for the Environment - FOEN)

How the pressure to biodiversity influenced the legal framework for collecting genetic resources

Over the last two centuries the methods of, and reasons for, collecting wild or dead specimen have changed significantly. From the of extensive encyclopaedic collections and 'cabinets of curiosities' private or public, the collecting moved to the duty to knowledge, understanding and management of the natural and cultural and cultural heritage. Taking into account the increasing rate of species extinction and that local populations are the custodians of biodiversity and traditional knowledge's and survive from it, an international legal framework has developed. Among the international instruments, the Nagoya protocol aims in restoring the balance between the sovereign rights of states over their natural resources and the public benefits of the products derived from these resources.

After few years in veterinary medicine, she turned to parasitology at the University of Neuchâtel. During a stay in Tasmania, she trained in molecular genetics in the field of conservation. As a recipient of the Marie Heim Vögtlin grant from the Swiss National Research Foundation, she completed a PhD thesis at the University of Lausanne on the palaeontology of different ecotypes of vole based on molecular markers. She collaborated in research projects in the field of biological control and conservation. In 2002 she was engaged in the federal office for the environment where she heads the section Biotechnology. She is a current member of the Swiss delegation for the negotiations under the convention of the biological diversity.

■ **Moderator: Geraldine Delley** (Laténium, University of Neuchâtel)

Trained in archaeology and history of archaeology at the Universities of Neuchâtel and Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, I completed a PhD thesis at the University of Neuchâtel on the history of collaborations between archaeologists, botanists and nuclear physicists in the development of radiocarbon and dendrochronology as dating tools in prehistory. I was Honorary research assistant at the Institute of Archaeology University College of London, then post-doctoral fellow in an SNF project at the University of Neuchâtel. Since 2017, I have held the position of Deputy Director of the Laténium, where I produce temporary exhibitions and participate in the management of the museum's collections. Since 2020, I am also a lecturer at the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Neuchâtel. In my research, in the exhibitions I prepare and in my teaching, I approach archaeology from a history of science perspective, questioning the mechanisms of knowledge construction and its dissemination. I am also interested in the political and societal issues related to the development, practice and reception of archaeology between the 19th and 21st centuries.

Workshop:

New voices and approaches on decolonization in Latin American contexts

— Alexander Wilhelm Armin Kellner (Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro)

Struggling to defeat a major crisis – The case of the Museu Nacional

Major crises can annihilate or be an opportunity to strengthen an institution. On September 2, 2018, the worst fear of the cultural and scientific community in Brazil became reality: the National Museum/UFRJ went up in flames. The palace that since 1892 has become the headquarters of the oldest museum in the country, home to kings and emperors, housing around 20 million specimens, was partially destroyed. Despite the immense shock, in the same week the Museum again offered activities to the public in tents set up in the open space. In 2019, the Museu Nacional Vive project (Museu Nacional Lives) was established and brought together national and international organizations (e.g., UNESCO), which laid the groundwork for the reconstruction. However, international help is still needed to obtain financial assistance and original objects for future exhibitions. The reconstruction of the National Museum is a great opportunity to show what international collaboration in the cultural arena can achieve, especially in the challenging times we live in.

Born in Liechtenstein and naturalized Brazilian, he has graduated in geology and earned a MSc from UFRJ, a M. Phil and a Ph.D. from Columbia University in a joint program with the American Museum of Natural History. Since 1997, he works at the Museu Nacional/UFRJ, where he was recently reelected as director for 2022–2026. Published over 1200 publications (including about 300 original studies); wrote several popular books and curated national and international exhibits. Organized expeditions around the Globe, including Brazil, Atacama (Chile), Kerman (Iran), Liaoning (China) and Antarctica (James Ross Island). Due his scientific activity he received several honors, (e.g., Brazilian Academy of Sciences, TWAS) and is Research Associate of the American Museum of Natural History and the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (China). He was also admitted to the National Order of Scientific Merit Commendador class and promoted to the Grand Cross Class.

— Tomás Bartoletti (ETH Zurich)

History Matters: Archival Research and Natural History Museums

My contribution aims to highlight the relevance of historical research in natural history museums. Histories of collections cannot be reduced to provenance research alone; we need a more situated and detailed analysis of archival sources and their broader contexts. Moreover, recent historiographical trends – global history, ‘new imperial histories’ and postcolonial studies, for example – have provided new tools to produce a different narrative to the age-old hagiographies of the sciences and museums. By focusing on the Peruvian collection of Swiss naturalist Johann Jakob von Tschudi in Neuchatel, I will show how archival research and a critical interpretation of primary sources are crucial to achieve an understanding of the colonial legacies of Neuchatel’s Natural History Museum. Lastly, this might well be the starting point to challenge old-fashioned notions about natural history museums as neutral and a-political spaces.

Tomás Bartoletti is a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence and Associate Researcher at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zürich. His research interests include the history of science and empire, the history of capitalism, environmental history, and the global histories of Latin America, Germany, and Switzerland. Tomás earned his PhD from the University of Buenos Aires. He read Latin American Literature and Linguistics at the University of Buenos Aires and History of Science and Technology at the University of Quilmes (Argentina). Between 2019 and 2021, Tomás was a Postdoctoral Fellow at ETH in Zürich. He has been Researcher in the Gotha Research Centre (2019), the University of Erfurt (2017–2018) and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (2014–2016).

— Marcelo Sánchez-Villagra (University of Zurich)

Inequalities, Decolonisation, and the Doughnut

There are ongoing academic discussions and actions to address ‘decolonisation’, and the problem of ‘parachute science’. Fieldwork and palaeontological and archaeological research in Venezuela while based in Europe over 20 years have led to ways to address these issues – creation of a local museum, training and support of local collaborators, financial incentives tied to research contributions, participation in publications. These non-trivial efforts cannot address the fundamental unfairness and contrasting realities. Higher studies abroad from Venezuelans has mostly resulted in economic refugees and brain drainage. Implementing ‘decolonisation’ is needed but the academic enterprise has to be redirected globally, with local solutions. Three principles of ‘Doughnut Economy’ served to generate goals for a socially engaged and ecologically sound new academic order.

M.R. Sánchez-Villagra is director of the Department of Paleontology and professor of Palaeobiology at the University of Zurich. A native Argentinian first trained in Caracas, he conducted his PhD studies at Duke University followed by a Habilitation in Tübingen and subsequent appointment at the Natural History Museum in London. The research group he leads conducts mostly collections-based investigations of diverse aspects of past and current biodiversity and includes fieldwork. Besides research on megafaunal evolution and extinction in Venezuela, his main current interests concern the process of animal domestication (2022 book, Princeton University Press) and the consideration of indigenous knowledge and cultural anthropology in studies of cultural macroevolution in South America (www.msanchezlab.net)

—— Aldo Benites Palomino (University of Zurich)

20 years in the making: The quick rise of the local fossil collection in Peru (Natural History Museum of Lima)

During the last 20 years several fossil findings from Peru have been internationally acclaimed due to their importance for understanding the evolution of two of the largest modern ecosystems: the South Pacific and the Amazon rainforest. While most of these remains are now stored in the small (but quickly growing) local collection at the Natural History Museum in Lima, several materials (including holotypes) were exported from the country in doubtful circumstances between 1950—1990. This was not just an isolated event as the same pattern repeated asynchronously across Latin America. Integrative efforts to revert this situation have been promoted by local and international peers, by supporting local scholars to not only study these fossils, but also protect them.

Aldo Benites-Palomino is a PhD student at the University of Zurich (UZH), Switzerland. In 2018 he obtained his BSc in Biology at the National University of San Marcos (Lima, Peru) and his MSc in Palaeontology in 2021 at UZH. His research focuses on the rise and dawn of late Miocene (10—5 myr) toothed whales from the South Pacific. Since 2020 he has participated and lead the description of several fossils from Peru, trying to re-value the language and culture of his home country.

—— Moderator: Ludovic Maggioni (MHNN)

Ludovic Maggioni has been the director of the Museum of Natural History of Neuchâtel (MHNN) since 2016. He is also a member of the steering committee of Info Fauna and serves on the scientific committee of the Master program in Museum Studies at the University of Neuchâtel. Prior to joining MHNN, he was a cultural mediator at the Museum of Natural History of Grenoble from 1998 to 2007, and manager of the exhibition department at the Industrial, Technical and Scientific Culture Center “La Casemate” in Grenoble from 2007 to 2016. He also taught at the University of Grenoble/Alpes as an adjunct professor. Trained as a biologist and with considerable museum experience, he describes himself not as a specialist but as a “cultural agitator”. For him, the museum is a playing field to experiment with various methods of integrating science and culture. The notion of the Anthropocene is at the heart of his interests, and the MHNN’s program and activities reflect this interest.

3rd panel: Naming Natures

Victor Gonzalez (University of Kansas)

Folk and scientific taxonomies of pollinators: do they go hand in hand?

Naming and ordering life are part of our human nature. People have always named, identified, and classified organisms to make sense of the world around us. This type of traditional knowledge system (folk taxonomy) varies among cultures and regions, unlike the scientific taxonomy that uses a global system of communication based on stable concepts and principles. While in some cases folk taxonomy might be well developed and overlapped with the scientific taxonomy, in other cases it is limited and separated from the scientific system, as in the case of bees. Despite the ecological and economic importance of bees, research suggests that local people have limited knowledge regarding the full richness of bees. People recognize only a small fraction of bees that produce honey and relegate the remaining species to other taxonomic categories, if they recognize them at all. I will discuss the possible causes and the implications of this pattern for conservation efforts, which is likely to be widespread among insect groups.

Victor Gonzalez is an assistant teaching professor in the Undergraduate Biology Program and associate researcher at the Biodiversity Institute of the University of Kansas. Most of his research has focused on comparative morphological studies of native bees aimed at understanding their historical relationships and documenting their diversity, particularly from tropical areas. In collaboration with anthropologists and botanists, he has investigated the classification and importance of native bees and plants to indigenous peoples in Mexico and Colombia, including communities displaced by Colombia's long-lasting civil war. His current research program includes behavioral and ecophysiological studies to better predict bees' responses to climate change. He is actively engaged with government and non-government organizations in his native country of Colombia to enhance conservation efforts and to assess biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Sophie Laligant (University of Tours)

Normes à penser, normes de pensées. Pour un débat respectueux et engagé des catégories.

Sophie Laligant est maîtresse de conférences à l'Université de Tours et elle a soutenu son HDR en 2020 à l'Inalco. Anthropologue et archéologue de formation (Costa Rica), spécialiste des relations hommes/natures, sa démarche multi-située et interdisciplinaire articule de longue date le local et le global, dans les sociétés contemporaines rurales et urbaines. Posant la démarche de l'ethnoscience comme slow-science impliquée, ses recherches se prêtent particulièrement à une épistémologie de la dialectique perceptions/natures/environnements alors que notre époque vit une catastrophe écologique. Croisant le champ de l'écologie politique, les concepts heuristiques d'expérience des catégories et d'écospace des catégories contribuent au débat sur la complexité des relations à la biodiversité et à l'environnement en ce qu'ils permettent de visualiser les dynamiques de convergence et d'expérimentation que les individus et les sociétés en ont, et ainsi faire émerger la connaissance de modèles sociaux en regard de collectifs qui se désagrègent, adviennent ou se reconfigurent.

Moderator: Jessica Litman (MHNN)

Jessica Litman completed her PhD at Cornell University in 2012 and has been the curator of the entomological collections at the Museum of Natural History of Neuchâtel since 2014. With a particular interest in megachilid bees, she uses phylogenetic and morphological tools to improve bee classification and to better understand the evolution of bee behavior. As part of her museum work, she is also involved in the preparation of exhibitions, public outreach, and the organization of conferences related to the natural sciences.

4th panel:

Decolonizing natural sciences through contemporary art

— Bergit Arends (Courtauld Institute of Art, London)

Museum collections are sources of both cultural and environmental knowledge, particularly natural sciences collections. With a surge in addressing environmental histories and the need to decolonise museums, contemporary artists are mobilising archives. But which uses have historic natural sciences collections, particularly when coloniality and imperialism are embodied in collections of the natural world? I discuss these issues through international artists research-based residencies (Daniel Boyd (Australia), Hu Yun (China), and Sunjo D (India)) at the Natural History Museum London to explore historic and contemporary encounters. The artists engaged with provenance, bureaucracy, access, and visibility. These projects emphasise that artists, together with museum staff and communities, can create a forum for public, critical exchanges. To extend the discussion I present the collaborative project *Seeds of Empire* (2021) by Joy Gregory and Philip Miller. The artists set into transhistorical dialogue early British modern science, botany, and medical practices from Sir Hans Sloane *A Voyage to ... Jamaica (1707–1725)* and contemporary testimonies of migration from Jamaica to England. Shown in different contexts these works offer ways to address injustices embedded in the practices of science, to find new forms of critique, and to co-create new knowledge.

Bergit Arends is a curator of contemporary art, museum professional and academic in the arts and humanities. Bergit creates and studies interdisciplinary curatorial and artistic processes with a focus on visual art, environment, and natural history collections. She publishes widely, including on the politics of natural sciences collections and critical engagements in *'Unequal Earth'* (NaturKultur 2021), *The Botanical City* (2020), *Botanical Drift* (2018), *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* (2018), and on decolonising natural history museums (*Art in Science Museums* 2019). Her thesis *'Contemporary Art, Archives and Environmental Change in the Age of the Anthropocene'* (2017) resulted among other in the award-winning publication *Chrystel Lebas. Field Studies* (2018). She has curated contemporary art projects for the natural history museums in London and Berlin (*Art/Nature* 2019). Bergit is British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. Part of her research is the preparation of a publication on photography, ecology, and archives in the Anthropocene.

— Bianca Baldi (University of Antwerp)

The Parable of the Sunfish

The Parable of the Sunfish is a new body of visual research. Baldi looks at the figure of Louis Agassiz the Swiss natural scientist who would apply his research in the field of polygenism and implement the early photographic technology of the daguerreotype for racist ends in his notorious depictions of enslaved people in 1850. Baldi will present recent work which reflects on how a Western imaginary historically used scientific exploration: the pursuit for knowledge to conceive a narrative of progress and innovation and forgive the violence of colonialism. Her artworks including *Play-White* (2019), *Zero Latitude* (2014) or *Eye at the Back of Your Head* (2017) are given as examples where the colonial collections are the starting points to unravel questions related to the infrastructure of power as carried through the object or image.

Bianca Baldi (South Africa, 1985) is an artist and researcher who lives and works in Brussels. In her work she deals with the role of narrative as a means of knowledge production in both fictional and historical contexts. She is interested in the staging of identity and history and looks at these themes in photography, film, writing and publishing, which she often combines in the exhibition format as installations. She is a PhD researcher at Sint Lucas Antwerpen.

— Moderator: Denise Bertschi (EPFL Lausanne)

Denise Bertschi is a doctoral researcher at Arts of Sciences Laboratory at EPFL Lausanne, whose artistic research is located at the intersection of visual culture, architecture and history. She critically investigates not only archives, but landscapes or the built environment on their colonial entanglement related to Switzerland's role in extra-European expansion. Her academic and artistic work takes the form of video-installations, book publications or films and raises questions around cultural myths, such as Swiss neutrality. Denise Bertschi was awarded the "Manor Art Prize" in the Aargauer Kunsthhaus in 2020, and twice the "Most Beautiful Swiss Books" in 2019 and 2022 for her monographs. Her work is widely exhibited; in the CCS Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris, the Swiss National Museum in Zürich, the Fotomuseum Winterthur, or Artsonje in Seoul, Artivist in Johannesburg or the LACA Los Angeles. She was previously a Getty Research Summer Fellow (Los Angeles) and artist in residence with Pro Helvetia and La Becque. She published several monographs entitled "State Fiction. The Gaze of the Swiss Neutral Mission in the Korean DMZ" (Centre de la Photographie Genève, 2021), "Strata. Mining Silence" (Aargauer Kunsthhaus, 2020) and her newest book, the co-edited volume "Unearthing Traces. Dismantling the imperialist entanglements of archives, landscapes and the built environment" (EPFL Press, 2023).

Workshop: Public oriented museum practices

■ Noémie Étienne (University of Vienna)

The Exotic? Switzerland

The Exotic? Switzerland looking Outward in the Enlightenment is an interdisciplinary show curated by Claire Brizon, Noémie Étienne and Chonja Lee at the Palais de Rumine in Lausanne (2020—2021). The show (supported by an AGORA-grant) was part of Noémie Étienne's SNF-project at the University of Bern (2016—2022). It traced back the global and material histories of Swiss people through art and material culture.

Noémie Étienne is full professor of art history and cultural heritage at the University of Vienna (Austria). She was previously a Getty Research Fellow (Los Angeles) and a Andrew Mellon fellow at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYC. Her most recent monograph is entitled *The Art of the Anthropological Diorama* (Les presses du réel, 2020; De Gruyter, 2021). She studies dioramas and displays made by Indigenous people or depicting Native populations in New York around 1900. Her first monograph, *The Restoration of Paintings in Paris, 1750-1815. Practice, Discourse, Materiality* has been published in French in 2012 (Presses Universitaires de Rennes), and subsequently translated by the Getty Conservation Institute in 2017. Recently, she co-edited *Rhapsodic Objects* with Yaëlle Biro (De Gruyter, 2021), and *Exotic Switzerland? Zurich* (Diaphanes, 2020), with C. Brizon, C. Lee, and E. Wismer. In 2023, she received an ERC Consolidator Grant for her research project entitled "Global Conservation: Histories and Theories (16th—21st centuries)." She is also a co-founder and editor of *Journal18*.

■ Priska Gisler (Bern Academy of the Arts HKB)

The Case of the "animals of Africa" at the Natural History Museum in Bern

I will talk about the research project "'Animals of Africa' behind Glass", which deals with the origin, history and development of a series of dioramas exhibited at the Natural History Museum in Bern. Almost 100 years ago a new building has been opened for these habitat dioramas and almost every schoolchild in Bern has seen and drawn them since then at least once. The history and narrative of the 'Africa' dioramas goes back to a big game hunt by two Bernburgers, Bernard and his daughter Vivienne von Wattenwyl, who undertook a long journey from London to British East Africa in 1923/24. As images of unspecified African landscapes, the dioramas are fascinating. The format still succeeds in creating an illusion of animals and landscapes that are said to be Africa. In an interdisciplinary team, we are investigating the question of which models and ideas were used as a basis for the production and maintenance of these dioramas, which originate from a colonial context. In my contribution, I will briefly address a few aspects that I think could be particularly interesting for this conference and that have to do with the relationship between science and art or scientific and artistic practice.

Priska Gisler (Prof. Dr.), born in 1965, is a sociologist and scholar in science & technology studies (STS), and head of the institute Practices and Theories of the Arts at Hochschule der Künste Bern (HKB). Her research focuses on artistic and scientific modes of knowledge production, human-animal relations and the reflection of historical changes in the artistic field and art education.

■ Olivia Fahmy (Independent Art Historian and Curator)

How can contemporary artists contribute to the spaces of science Museums? What can they initiate to decolonize these spaces? Is that their role? When curating contemporary art, what does it mean to be in an active process and attempt of decolonization of the museum? Where decolonization begins and ends? Far from being opposed, the approaches of artists and researchers can be instead complementary: inviting contemporary artists to propose artworks and installations in science Museum potentially allows an echo between these diverse spheres of activity and critical thinking process towards the objects exhibited in the museum.

Olivia Alexandra Fahmy (1990) is an art historian and curator. She holds a Master's degree in art history from the University of Lausanne and a Master's degree in Contemporary Art Theory with a focus on critical approaches from Goldsmith's College University of London. She is the author of texts published in scientific catalogues (sikart.ch), art magazines and for contemporary art funds (Le Phare, FRAC Alsace) and exhibition catalogues (Camille Kaiser, CHO, Luc Andrié). Associate curator at the Musée d'art de Pully from 2014 to 2017, head of publications at the Centre de la photographie Genève in 2018, she co-founded and co-directed the art space Tunnel Tunnel in Lausanne with the eponymous collective from 2015 to 2022. Since 2019, she is the curator of the collection of African Contemporary Art and of the Diaspora at the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art in Geneva. From 2023 onwards, she has been appointed as member of the Commission cantonale des affaires culturelles in the Canton of Vaud.

Organizing committee :

Tomás Bartoletti (ETHZ) – Denise Bertschi (EPFL) – Celia Bueno (MHNN) –
Jessica Litman (MHNN) – Ewa Maczek, (OCIM) – Ludovic Maggioni (MHNN) –
Mathieu Viau-Courville (Ocim) – Dave Wisard (MHNN)

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For further details, see also the partner project *Naming Natures* :

www.naming-natures.ch

