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# “Scottish Museums’ Approaches to Post-Colonial Narratives”

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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## List of Acronyms

BGE - Broad General Education

BLM - Black Lives Matter

BAME - Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

ICOM - International Council of Museums

OSCH - Our Shared Cultural Heritage

UK - United Kingdom

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## Abstract

This research uses *Curating Discomfort* in the Hunterian Museum and *Glasgow - City of Empire* in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum as case studies. This research is the first to examine the new permanent post-colonial displays in these two Scottish museums. The problems addressed are gaps regarding how emerging approaches to post-colonial interpretations can be practically implemented in Scottish museums and how curation processes can be decolonised. The purpose of this research is to determine how Scottish museums present post-colonial narratives, how democratic the curation process was and how effectively these approaches engaged visitors.

The research is qualitative and constructivist. The data sources include interviews with relevant museum staff, visitor observations and documentary sources. The data was triangulated and analysed within a multiple case studies design.

Whereas the Kelvingrove created an exhibit for these narratives, the Hunterian opted for an intervention centred around existing exhibit space. The key findings show that both projects were curated by temporary curatorial teams managed by an ethnic minority permanent curator. There was minimal outreach to source communities during the curation processes. *Glasgow - City of Empire* appeals to different types of learners through multiple types of display. *Curating Discomfort* fails to remind visitors to think critically meaning that the labels too often rely on didacticism. *Glasgow - City of Empire* prompted more tours of and stops within the space than *Curating Discomfort*. The research offers a guideline to other museums on how to approach post-colonial projects by highlighting good practice and outlining what pitfalls to avoid.

## Key words

Post-colonialism, authorised heritage discourse, decolonisation, diversification, intervention, exhibition, interpretation, learning, didacticism, constructivism, qualitative, interviews, observations.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1. Topic

This research paper focuses on how two Scottish museums teach visitors through post-colonial narratives. This research used the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum and The Hunterian Museum in Glasgow as case studies to critically analyse how museums can use their collections and include new perspectives to present post-colonial narratives. These museums are hereafter referred to as the Hunterian and the Kelvingrove. The Hunterian and Kelvingrove were chosen because they both introduced permanent displays dedicated to addressing colonial legacies within their collections, with *Curating Discomfort* and *Glasgow - City of Empire* respectively. The latter is hereafter referred to as *City of Empire*.

While visiting the Hunterian in 2022, I was struck by how *Curating Discomfort* (Figures 1-2), opened in early 2022, brought attention to narratives around colonialism, the British Empire, the Transatlantic Slave Trade and their continuing legacies. Many of these perspectives and narratives were ones that I had not encountered before. When the Kelvingrove opened the *City of Empire* exhibition (Figures 3-4) in November 2023, I wanted to see how it compared in how it presents post-colonial narratives. Both projects involved members of the BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) diaspora in Glasgow during the curation process.



Figure 1. *Curating Discomfort* displays (photograph by author)



Figure 2. *Curating Discomfort* displays (photograph by author)



Figure 3. *City of Empire* exhibition space (photograph by author)

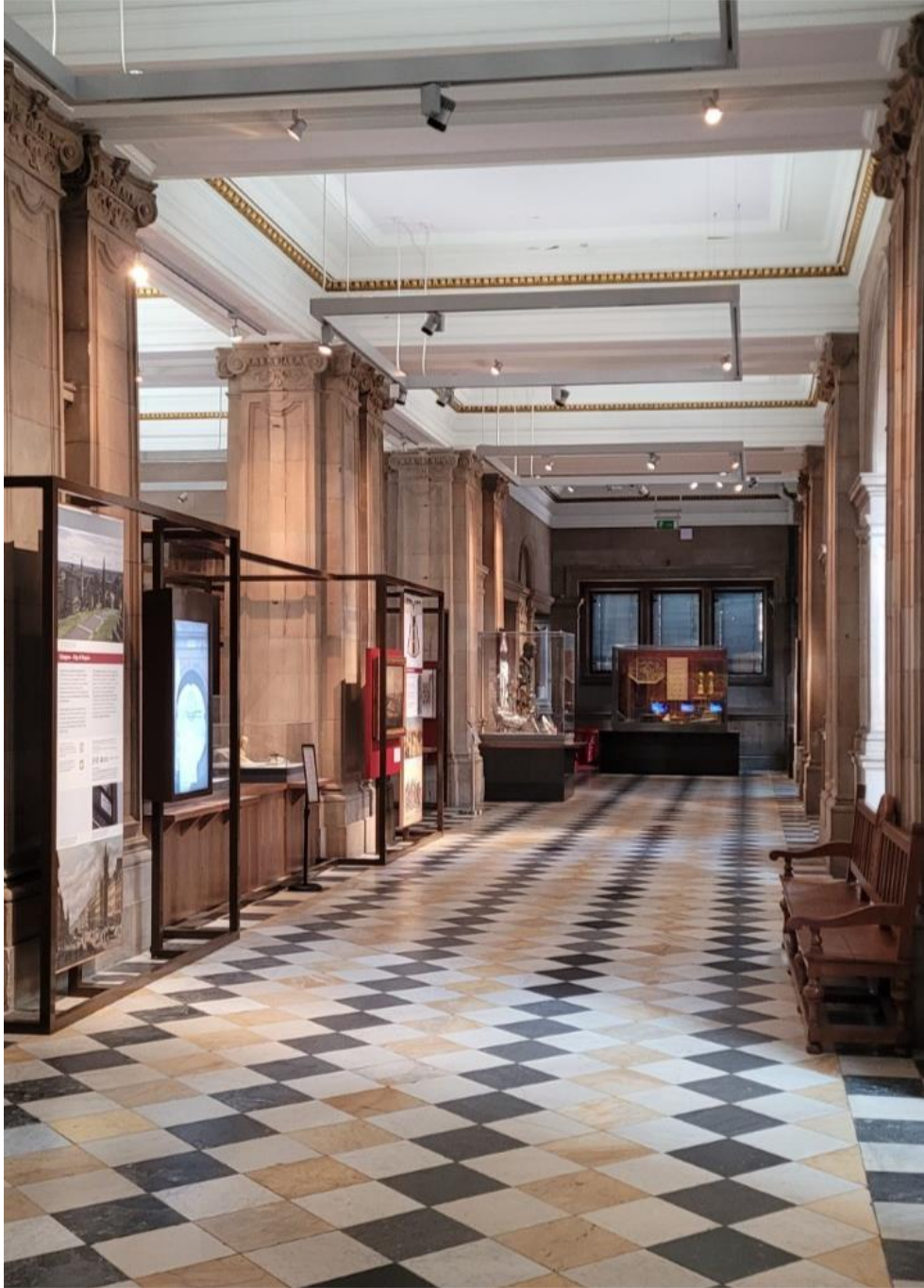


Figure 4. *City of Empire* exhibition space (photograph by author)

## 2. Researcher's Assumptions

Growing up in England, I did not learn about the British Empire at any stage of my formal education despite taking history through to A-Levels. Although we had

modules on topics such as the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we only learned about the plantations in the USA and not about British involvement nor the abolition movement in Britain. After encountering *Curating Discomfort*, I realised that museums have also long overlooked these subjects. Regarding museum pedagogy, my assumption before starting this research was that post-colonial installations are designed to fill in these gaps in knowledge.

This acted as my starting point for the research, but the literature review and findings show that, while these experience-based assumptions were credible, *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* had more than one purpose.

Kovach notes that “we know what we know from where we stand. We need to be honest about that.” (cited in Macdonald, 2022, p. 9). I have tried to approach this topic with sensitivity and understanding but I expect that my responses to the case studies have still been unconsciously influenced by the dominant white British, heterosexual, cisgender male perspective which I belong to.

### 3. Problem Statement

This research addresses several problems. The Hunterian and Kelvingrove are at the forefront of the post-colonial shift in Scottish museums and their post-colonial installations have not yet been studied. Using these two museums, I investigated how museums can address their colonial links. The Kelvingrove and Hunterian used two different approaches, so this research compares their merits and drawbacks. In doing this, I have determined how these two cases vary in their approach to stimulating visitor learning and to what extent these approaches attract and maintain visitor engagement.

Another problem addressed in this research is how decolonisation has been and can be enacted in museums’ curation processes. This includes outlining whether the case studies diversified their curatorial team, how democratic the curation process was and to what extent these approaches had gaps or issues. By

democratic, I mean to what extent did non-permanent curators have a meaningful input into the final interpretations displayed.

Literature on this topic details how museums became implicated in colonial exploitation and how museums dictated who had authority over interpretations of cultural objects from other countries. Literature further outlines how post-colonial thinking emerged along with subsequent re-evaluations of museum collections. I further contrast how museums have supported or resisted this post-colonial shift, and what actions academics and professionals recommend to effectively decolonise. In the Scottish context, literary sources highlight how Scotland is now beginning to address its colonial history in schools and museums. These topics are further explored in the following Literature Review chapter.

#### 4. Context of Post-colonialism within Scotland's Educational and Cultural System

Contextually, Young (2020) outlines that colonialism was a “system that created rigid structures of profound inequality at many levels, justified ideologically by the doctrine of race” (p. 5). While there are different forms of colonialism, “Inevitably, however, colonial regimes steal the country of colonised peoples” (Veracini, 2022, pp. 1-2). Scotland was directly involved in this sustained injustice as part of the British Empire.

Due to this history as an imperial power and a rise in progressive social movements, there has been an increasing spotlight on colonial legacies in museums in Britain. Bernhard (2019) states that “there are no universally agreed definitions of the terms ‘postcolonial’ and ‘postcolonial theory’” (p. 302). Young’s definition of post-colonialism, however, offers a broad yet clear understanding of the principle. Young (2020) outlines that the term post-colonialism “began to be used from the 1990s” to represent “perspectives critical of or resistant to colonialism or colonial attitudes.” (p. 3). Furthermore, post-colonialism actively advocates for the “right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well-being” (Young, 2020, p. 5).

Post-colonial thinking became relevant for Western museums as they researched the extent to which objects in their collections have colonial links and addressed how they as institutions are implicated in legacies of exploitation and misrepresentation.

Similarly, in relation to Scottish education, there has been an increasing focus on addressing Scotland's colonial history and how these colonial links influenced Scottish society; this is specifically outlined in Section 19. *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* reflect this shift towards addressing these previously unexplored narratives.

## 5. Context of Research Sites and Subjects

Both the Hunterian and Kelvingrove have links to colonial exploitation, British occupation of other countries or individuals linked to the Transatlantic Slave Trade in their collections and physical locations. These links will be outlined in the Literature Review.

Both museums acknowledged and sought to address these colonial links and legacies through new curatorial projects. In response to these links, the Hunterian developed *Curating Discomfort* to “address historic power imbalances within the museum” (The Hunterian, n.d. -a, para. 1).

Similarly, Glasgow Life (also known as Glasgow Museums), a charity connected to the Kelvingrove and several other museums in Glasgow, recognised that “Transatlantic slavery and the British Empire were integral to the development of Glasgow” and “its museums” (Greenwood, 2021, p. 27). Glasgow Life sought to “do more to build an understanding of how racism has developed as a legacy of colonialism.” (Glasgow Life, n.d. -a, Our Anti-racism Stance section, para. 1).

These reasons mark a clear progressive shift towards a post-colonial reappraisal of museum practice, wherein the institutions sought to decolonise their collections and interpretations. Therefore, Glasgow and its museums' colonial links

combined with their post-colonial agenda made for the ideal setting for this post-colonial research focus.

## 6. Importance of the Study

The rationale for this research is to understand how museums choose to frame post-colonial narratives. In understanding this, it can be determined how museums can best address colonial legacies within their own collections and how to manifest this into an inclusive learning environment. The significance of the research findings can potentially benefit museums by outlining how to:

- Use colonial links to incorporate and empower previously unheard voices in producing educational material;
- Avoid pitfalls that come with decolonising;
- Critically address colonial links within collection and museum practice itself;
- Situate displays/exhibits in museum to best promote the post-colonial theme, engage visitors and reinforce learning.

## 7. Aims and Objectives

The three aims of this research are to determine how museums present post-colonial narratives, how democratic the curation process was and how effective these approaches are at engaging visitors. These aims are directly reflected in the research questions, which are:

1. How do these museums present post-colonial narratives?
2. Who has a say in how post-colonial narratives are told within these museums?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these post-colonial projects as tools for learning?

The objective of the first aim is to determine how the museum use their space and collection to provide learning material to visitors about post-colonial topics. The objectives of the second aim are to determine if and how the curation

process behind these post-colonial displays differ from previous practice in terms of whose voices were incorporated and whether these had any impact on the final product. The objectives of the third aims are to determine how the museums aim to stimulate learning in visitors and to test if visitors engage with the displays. The results of this comparison are intended to identify whether the curator's aims work in practice.

## 8. Methodology

This research followed a constructivist ontological approach because the rationale behind why and how post-colonial narratives were introduced is subjective and qualitative.

The methodology involved interviewing museum professionals to gather data on how post-colonial narratives were chosen, who had a say in the displayed interpretation, aims for visitor learning, and visitor responses. Observations of visitor behaviour were undertaken to identify *Curating Discomfort's* and *City of Empire's* ability to attract and hold visitors' attention. This allowed me to compare what affordances the two cases have for visitor learning and what areas can be improved.

The overall sample size was 34 observation participants and 6 interview participants. An embedded research design was used to analyse data and draw conclusions. This is further discussed in the Methodology chapter.

## 9. Organisation of the Dissertation

In the following chapters, the literature review establishes why post-colonial narratives are necessary within museum education, the methodology outlines the rationale and process for the interviews and observations, and the research findings answer the research questions. The conclusion summarises the key points raised and offers suggestions for future museum practice.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 10. Context

Through *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire*, the Hunterian and Kelvingrove have sought to bring attention to colonial legacies within their collections and Scottish society at large. This literature review first outlines how and why postcolonial narratives have become relevant to Western museums. The focus then narrows to examine colonial links in Scotland and Scottish museums, particularly those of the case studies in Glasgow.

This literature review draws on primary sources, including reports and data sets regarding educational institutions in Scotland as well as academic writings that cover the museology and museography surrounding the shift towards acknowledging colonial links in museums.

### 11. Critiques of Museums

To discuss post-colonial narratives in museums, it is important to first outline how museums have benefitted from being historically implicated in colonial exploitation.

The inequalities of colonialism manifested themselves in European museums through the collection of objects from colonies. These museums throughout Europe “arose ... to glorify and display the achievements of empire” meaning that “museums were deeply implicated in the colonial enterprise” (Whittington, 2021, p. 246). Many museums do not “know exactly how objects came into their collection” and while not all objects were collected in “acts of overt violent” looting, objects may have still been collected “through unequal colonial power dynamics” (Greenwood, 2021, p. 22). This shows the pervasiveness of the colonial ideology because the information about whether objects were collected ethically was considered unimportant. Here, museums willingly partook in a wider system of inequality and, at times, violent exploitation to expand their collections. In response, criticism of museums’ role in promoting imperialist viewpoints arose,

whether directly at the time colonial empires operated or indirectly after the dissolution of these empires. These criticisms exposed the imbalance of white/Western authority over non-white/non-Western cultural objects.

“In his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), Aimé Césaire attacked the European colonial tendency to destroy non-European cultures and then put their remnants in European museums.” (cited in Young, 2020, p. 39). Césaire’s criticism came during a time in which the European empires were starting to decline, with the French colonial empire having transitioned into the French Union and India gaining independence from Britain. Césaire’s criticism of showing ‘remnants’ of destroyed cultures demonstrates a continued function of museums to “glorify” empires through displaying decontextualised and incomplete colonial trophies even as these empires declined. Moreover, it emphasises the longstanding anger from BAME peoples in Europe towards seeing their cultural heritage fragmented and misrepresented as colonial history.

## 12. Authorised Heritage Discourse

This framing of museums as showcases for colonial exploits resonates with later and ongoing interpretations of museums. Influenced by Quijano, Whittington (2021) argues that the “role of the museum in constituting the ‘Other’ as “objects of knowledge” through processes of collecting and cataloguing implicates it in these practices of domination” (p. 249). This shows that, by cataloguing non-European objects, museums contributed to establishing a hierarchy wherein white society is active in relation to the passively studied non-European “objects of knowledge”. This hierarchy maintains the colonial structure of white supremacy through authorised heritage discourse. Developed by Laura Jane Smith, the concept of authorised heritage discourse posits that the perceived “meaning and value” given to heritage has traditionally “prioritised the experiences and values of the elite, white, male social classes.” (McKee, 2023, para. 15). This authorised heritage discourse took form through the documentation and naming of non-European

cultural objects. Turner notes “museum documentation, as an embedded institutional practice, helped cement narratives that have assisted in erasing, or at least hiding, those subaltern narratives” (Turner, 2020, p. 7). This is because the new Western names for non-Western objects caused many objects’ original names to be replaced, which made the colonial interpretation the official authority on that object and its cultural background. Consequently, the “legacies of colonial naming conventions ... devised at that time still impact how these collections are used today” because this colonial language continues to be used in place of the original (Turner, 2020, p. 9). Moreover, “Chilisa (2012, 9) makes it clear that colonisation not only typically involves “invasion and loss of territory” but also “the loss of control and ownership of ... knowledge systems, beliefs and behaviours... resulting in the captive or colonised mind”. (cited in Whittington, 2021, p. 250). This is perpetuated by museum practice because the implementation and continued use of colonial language to describe non-Western objects force past and present generations to use colonial language when discussing their own cultural heritage within the museum, thereby replacing and impeding the return of knowledge systems.

However, Greenwood (2021) observes that the “flattering, nostalgic lens used to be the norm in most European history and art museums until well into the first decade of this century.” (p. 215). This shift away from the non-critical “norm” is explored in the following section, which introduces the concept of post-colonialism.

### 13. Shift Towards Post-colonialism

As awareness of colonial links in museum collections grew, a shift in attitude towards museum practice developed among scholars and museum professionals. To represent this shift away from accepting colonialist interpretations, the term post-colonialism was coined. As previously outlined by Young (2021), post-colonialism opposes colonial attitudes and protects everyone’s “cultural wellbeing”.

Anti-colonialist criticism, such as Césaire's (1950), came during a time when several European empires still existed and thus represented an outside perspective that opposed the museums who were protected by the presiding power structures. Conversely, post-colonialism developed following the decline of these empires. In this way, post-colonialist action can actively instigate change by simultaneously interrogating past inequality, addressing legacies of colonialism in the present and course-correcting future practice. As a result, there has been "a boom in postcolonial approaches since the 1980s" (Bernhard, 2019, p. 302).

Young (2020) argues that "Postcolonial practice is oriented not simply towards analysis but also to intervention" (p. 10). This enables a transition from injustice to justice, inequality to equity and exclusion to inclusion in museums. Achieving post-colonial change can require democratising decision-making processes, relinquishing "institutional control over the tone of voice ... used in the interpretations" and acknowledging how "museums are not neutral" (Wajid and Minott, 2019, p. 25). This comes in many forms, such as decolonisation, repatriation and reinterpretation.

This shift has not been universally adopted nor has any change happened overnight. Indeed, post-colonial thinkers continue to work to overturn systemic legacies of colonialism.

#### 14. Opposition to Post-colonialism

A notable result of the post-colonial shift in museum culture is the emergence of repatriation cases, which forced many high-profile museums to take a clear stance regarding colonial legacy.

Contextually, repatriation involves returning objects from a museum collection to "a nation" while restitution specifically involves the "claimant communities from whom they were directly or indirectly expropriated" (Hicks, 2020, pp. 235-240). Furthermore, Green (2017) notes that "Most repatriation claims relate to objects ... that are suspected to have been looted, stolen, or illegally

exported from their country of origin.” (p. 6). Repatriation cases have incited contestation because successful negotiations often result in objects being returned to the source communities. Consequently, museums have met repatriation claims with varying levels of co-operation and resistance.

Hicks (2020) argues that if “no attempt is made” to return a “stolen object” then the museum continues a “story of ... colonial violence”, even if they attempt to address their colonial links through reinterpreted displays (p. 218). This emphasises Young’s point that post-colonial action requires genuine intervention because a failure to negotiate with source communities means that the museum does not actively reassess its colonial attitudes towards its collection or take steps to make reparations.

Museums that oppose repatriation claims, by extension, oppose post-colonial action because they not only passively maintain colonial structures but actively work to avoid taking post-colonialist action. Mignolo, cited in Bernhard (2019), argues that “the history of modernity cannot be understood without its ‘dark’ side, the history of coloniality.” (p. 299). Coloniality can be understood “not as a residue of the age of imperialism, but rather an ongoing structural, cultural, social and economic feature of global dynamics.” (Whittington, 2021, p. 248). While these residues can be seen in museums with the continued use of colonial language and presence of any contested objects not being addressed, the ongoing systemic coloniality is seen whenever a museum is unwilling to address its colonial links and instead double-down on their status.



Figure 5. The British Museum (photograph by author)

This coloniality is no more apparent than in the self-fashioned Universal Museums, who reaffirmed their claim to their collections. The Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums (2002) claims that objects in museums have become “part of the heritage of the nations which house them” (para. 2). This stance has been criticised for actively opposing post-colonial practice because it “fail[s] to acknowledge the unequal international power dynamics such as imperialism and slavery ... that resulted in the universal museum’s possession of many of the objects it seeks to retain” (Whittington, 2021, p. 252). Moreover, the way Universal Museums show “strong reluctance” to repatriation by “placing a number of barriers within the way of such claims” (Whittington, 2021, p. 252) demonstrates a lack of co-operation with people of different cultures, thereby maintaining their own authorised heritage discourse.

The declaration was signed by many high-profile international museums in Europe and North America, including the British Museum (Figure 5.) (Declaration, 2002, para. 5). Although the British Museum has recently produced co-curated exhibitions, these were only temporary (Giblin et al, 2019, pp. 474-480.).

Moreover, the British Museum is legally protected from repatriating objects (Godwin, 2020, p. 147). The concept of the Universal Museum relates to Mignolo's assessment of "global dynamics" because these high-profile museums shared a common goal to maintain the status quo of ownership and interpretation of objects collected from other countries. Herein, Universal Museums promote "typical European national narratives", which "tend to present the colonial past principally as a completely finished epoch in the age of imperialism" (Popp et al, 2019, p. 13). Universal Museums' claim to represent all peoples' history suggests that they already operate in a post-colonial society wherein nothing needs to be addressed. However, post-colonial theory and work show that lingering colonial mentalities still need to be uprooted and removed.

In a British context, post-colonial change can be further obstructed by the common attitude that criticism of the British Empire is anti-British (Rasch, 2019, p. 221). Consequently, a "balance sheet" mentality, which takes "into account both positive and negative aspects of the imperial past, permeates Britain's commemorative culture, yielding a simultaneous condemnation and endorsement of empire." (Rasch, 2019, p. 218). Rasch (2019) cites Gilroy to criticise this "balance sheet" stance by arguing that any "correctives" to post-colonial narratives do not offer neutral "counter-memory" but "actually represent the predominant narrative ... that meets the challenge of confronting the horrors of the imperial past with "a chain of defensive argumentation"" (p. 221). This extends to museum practice, wherein Said (1993) notes how many museums attempt to stay neutral by separating political and cultural "spheres" in their displays (p. 57). Said (1993) characterises this separation as a "disguised, denuded" tactic used to avoid addressing the "question of empire itself" that would otherwise emerge (p. 57). To credibly interpret collections, museums should accept and address the role of empire in how they came to acquire these objects. Any museum that proclaims to be neutral instead favours authorised heritage discourse over post-colonial interpretation because they either avoid addressing their colonial links or actively

defend these links rather than work towards systemic post-colonial change. Consequently, “racism ... is enacted in the perpetuation of the concept of ‘neutral history’ when discussing the enslavement and the eradication of cultures and peoples across the world by the British” (Wajid & Minott, 2019, p. 25). This is because these atrocities are excused by trusted institutions, like the ‘universalist’ British Museum, which influence many people to also respond negatively to post-colonial, anti-racist interpretations. Therefore, museums and cultural representations cannot be neutral (Giblin et al, 2019; Hicks, 2020; McNamara, 2019; Prianti & Suyadnya, 2022; Turner, 2020; Wajid & Minott, 2019).

While individual museums can actively work to deconstruct colonial power structures, global networks of high-profile museums can agree to resist these changes and maintain their neutral facade. To counter this coloniality primarily found “within former centres of empire” (ICOM 2007 cited in Whittington, 2021, p. 247), museums that support post-colonial action must also establish networks of museums and outside actors including communities and activists. These networks can work towards rejecting coloniality, combatting racist faux-neutrality and affecting change on a systemic level by setting new standards. This comes through promoting decolonisation.

## 15. Decolonisation

Whittington (2021) argues that “While institutions like the British Museum .... continue to argue for universalism, other public museums with longstanding colonial histories have shown that they have the capacity to take steps towards decolonization” (p. 264). Contextually, “decolonising the museum concerns the proactive identification, interrogation, deconstruction and replacement of hierarchies of power that replicate colonial structures.” (Giblin et al, 2019, p. 472).

To instigate change, it is important for museums to listen to and involve communities still affected by coloniality. Young (2020) notes that decolonisation must “begin not so much with the colonizers but with colonized peoples decolonizing themselves mentally from the ways in which they had been taught to see things from the perspective of the colonizers” (p. 4). This requires museums to hire or involve people to interpret collections who have previously been silenced by authorised heritage discourse. Herein, the curator can act as a “cultural agent of social change” by involving communities and activists (Fraser & Jim cited in Abraham, 2022, p. 71). In doing so, the museum would relinquish its unchallenged authority over heritage discourse and welcome new perspectives that closer relate to the cultural objects in the collections. Herein, the “decolonization of knowledge thus replaces the positivistic idea of one definitive history (‘the way it actually was’) with the idea of many different histories.” (Bernhard, 2019, p. 302). By decolonising and diversifying, museums can become truly universal by sharing their resources with people of all cultures to better interpret their collections rather than by protecting colonial knowledge systems or hoarding cultural objects.

Hicks, however, does note that “employing the rhetoric of decolonisation, without a genuine commitment to its practice” can lead to “obfuscation”, “tokenism”, exploitation of labour and various other issues “that allow violence to persist” (cited in Whittington, 2021, p. 246). Similarly, there is a danger that “these collaborative endeavours prove to be not only temporary but also superficial” with the museum “retaining control of the overall exhibition.” (Sieg, 2020, p. 227). This would maintain a colonial hierarchy because authorised heritage discourse is not permanently challenged. Museums and communities must share mutual trust and “a degree of power sharing”, which in turn requires the museum to address any “issues with their own policy-making hierarchy and power dynamics” (Young cited in Greenwood, 2021, p. 26). Likewise, museums should “pay fairly for external contributions” from co-curators (Minott cited in Giblin et al, 2019, p. 482). Therefore, the museum must situate equitable practice at the heart of its strategy to ensure all actions reflect this agenda.

Narkiss (2022) argues that decolonisation should involve addressing “where collections have come from, and how and why objects were collected.” (p. 190). However, Hicks criticises “the mere re-writing of labels or shuffling around stolen objects in new displays that re-tell the history of empire, no matter how ‘critically’ or self-consciously”, since reflexivity, in these circumstances, “becomes mere self-regard”” (cited in Whittington, 2021, 251). This is because the one-dimensional focus on the Western view and impact of colonisers is upheld rather than an opportunity to learn about the cultural heritage of the source communities. It is apparent that diversification is the best way to achieve decolonisation because it allows self-representation in a way that is distinct from the colonial perspective and gives space for celebration of one’s own cultural heritage. Indeed, permanent and progressive diversification of museum content has already taken place in many museums, which in doing so “have taken considerable risks in presenting new conversations with artists on the political periphery ... who have made a significant cultural shift with their message.” (McNamara, 2019, p. 105). In this way, decolonisation can redefine the museum “as a site of harm, contestation, contact, cultural negotiation, and potential healing” (Turner, 2020, p. 13). This is because the museum can reconcile their past wrongs with the opportunity to provide a platform for cultural expressions from previously underrepresented people.

Diversification and decolonisation of museum staff and collections reflects the desires of people in Scotland, who are “clear in wanting to see, hear and feel the perspectives and experiences of enslaved and colonized people.” (Greenwood, 2021, pp. 29-30). Scotland’s response to its historic ties to colonialism, empire and the Transatlantic Slave Trade are further discussed in the following sections.

## 16. Scotland and Colonialism

Following their own attempts to establish “settlement and trading schemes ... in Ireland and Canada” and a “failed attempt to break into the transatlantic slave trade” in Panama, Scotland joined with England to form the United Kingdom in 1707 (National Museums Scotland, n.d., Scotland and Empire section, paras. 5-6). Thereafter, “Scots played a central role in the managing and running of the Empire; indeed, they were disproportionately represented in the imperial endeavour when considering the size of the population.” (Liinpää, 2018, 16). Therefore, Scotland was historically connected to the long-running inequalities put in place by Britain. Indeed, by “1922, a fifth of the world’s population was under British rule.” (Popp et al, 2019, p. 27), making Scotland a key player in global affairs. Consequently, “the UK and Glasgow are multicultural, racially diverse societies because of the legacy of a multicultural, racially diverse empire.” (Greenwood, 2021, p. 17). Despite this history of immigration, Scotland’s national identity has not been informed by the range of different cultural perspectives and values.

Indeed, while “[h]istory plays a key part in nationalist narratives and processes of nation-building”, Scotland has, “until recently, failed to address Scotland’s substantive role as a colonial power from the eighteenth century onwards” (Liinpää cited in McKee, 2023, para. 3). The influence of merchants and slaveowners enabled the construction of an enduring national identity that celebrated the wealth, industry and culture of the era while turning a blind eye to the inequality and exploitation that it was built on. While the British Empire has long since ended, Liinpää (2018) notes that “this chapter of Scottish history is ever-present ... in our daily lives” due to the “statues and signage” dedicated to Scots involved in the “tobacco, sugar and slaves” trades found “around Glasgow’s city centre, and the Merchant City area especially.” (pp. 17-18). Similarly, figures such as David Livingstone have been immortalised as the “fully clothed figure in the roles of educator, civiliser, and defender of unnamed, partially clothed black Africans” (KcKee, 2023, para. 7). So, many remaining vestiges of Scotland’s colonial

history continue to support a Scottish national identity that normalises Scotland's role as a member of the British Empire while the victims of colonialism, slavery and racial inequality are still either underrepresented or misrepresented. Rasch (2019) notes that when people humanise "individual Britons engaged in imperial activities", they "grant the imperial enterprise a more sympathetic face (p. 222). While there may be awareness for their immoral actions, these figures are still humanised while colonised people are dehumanised and forgotten, which leaves an imbalanced impression of the perpetrators and victims of colonialism. Consequently, "For many people, empire and slavery are not things of the past. Their legacies and consequences are felt by people in Glasgow and around the world in very real ways. The most insidious of those legacies is racism." (Greenwood, 2021, p. 6). This research questions to what extent these ethnic minority perspectives are promoted in *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* to examine if these issues of inequity, erasure and racism were addressed in recent projects by Scottish museums.

## 17. Scottish Museums and Colonialism

As in Europe, Scottish museums celebrated the exploits of the British Empire, with Britain's imperial power showcased in Glasgow particularly.

The Kelvingrove estate was chosen as the site for the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, which opened "in 1901, as part of Glasgow's International Exhibition of that year" (Glasgow Life, n.d.-b, para. 1). This exhibition was the "high point in Scotland's imperial self-fashioning ... Glasgow 'extolled Britain's world supremacy, a claim substantiated by technological virtuosity and colonial domination'" (Lamont, 2023, p. 82). The museum's role in being built to stage this event shows that museums were seen as a key instrument for Scotland to flaunt their status within the British Empire. This display included "an early tangible expression of the white supremacist mode of British imperialism showcased at a major Scottish exhibition" with "indigenous people" from Rhodesia (itself a colonial exonym)

available to see within the “natural history” section (Lamont, 2023, p. 82). This is an explicit example of a Scottish museum supporting a system of racialised inequality because the event dehumanised African people by reducing these people to natural history and making them spectacles for visitors. Therefore, the Kelvingrove “could be considered public monuments to transatlantic slavery and empire” (Greenwood, 2021, p. 28) due to the museum’s ties to imperial exhibitions.

Similarly, The Hunterian is operated by the University of Glasgow and houses the collection of William Hunter, a Scottish anatomist. Despite the University of Glasgow’s “historic commitment to abolition”, the university also “gained significant financial benefits in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries through donations and bequests with their roots in slave ownership and the trade in slave-produced goods” (University of Glasgow, n.d., para. 3). These donations and financial contributions extended to the Hunterian; in 2019, the Hunterian’s current director Steph Scholten acknowledged that the museum has “deep roots in empire and colonisation” with objects coming to the museum “in quite often unequal circumstances” (cited in O’Neill, 2019, paras. 6-7). These “unequal circumstances” show that the Hunterian benefitted from the systemic colonial inequality because those involved in the British Empire used their power to claim objects, which were then funnelled into museum collections. Examples and acknowledgment of this illicit form of collecting are highlighted in the findings chapter.

## 18. Challenges for Scottish Museums

The legacies of these pro-imperialist practices in Scottish museums have continued into this decade. In his 2021 report for Glasgow Museums, Greenwood argues that, at his time of writing, many “museums are complicit in reinforcing” a “racialized and gendered” narrative “centring white men as the makers, explorers, collectors and authors, the creators of knowledge that they celebrate” (p. 29). Meanwhile, these museums “‘other’ the histories of people of colour (if they

include them at all), while excluding them from telling their own story on an equal basis.” (Greenwood, 2021, p. 19). This criticism levelled at contemporary museums for their biased interpretations make it apparent that, even as recently as 2021, the authorised heritage discourse had not shifted away from the traditional white, male viewpoint.

Similarly, human rights activist Sir Geoff Palmer reported in 2022 that, based on consultations “with almost 5,000 individuals nationwide”, it was found that BAME people in Scotland see museums as contributing to “the cultural landscape of racism”, which has led “to a lack of trust” in museums from this demographic (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022a, pp. 6-7). Significant and continual action is required among Scottish museums to rebuild this trust.

Moreover, McKee (2023) argues that British imperialism “maintained and upheld dominant white western ideologies that contribute to the realities of racism in present-day Scotland.” (para. 3). These three sources correspond with Wajid & Minott’s (2019) assessment of museums perpetuating racism, as outlined in Section 14. So long as authorised heritage discourse prioritises white, patriarchal perspectives in museums, then the racial hierarchy installed by the colonialist ideology will remain. This will continue to contribute towards current issues with racism because visitors will only learn from an authoritative interpretation deeply rooted in the racist dismissal of non-white narratives. Post-colonial action is necessary to combat racism and question long-held assumptions about Scottish national identity.

## 19. Formal vs Nonformal Education in Scotland

This authorised heritage discourse has also been reproduced “in the history classroom”, which have avoided presenting colonial history as “negative heritage” (Popp et al, 2019, p. 13). This combination of classroom and museum learning has contributed to a widespread lack of knowledge and understanding around themes of colonialism, slavery or the British Empire among Scottish people.

Scottish schools initially adhere to a “Broad General Education” (BGE) programme, which covers the education of students from the age of four in primary school [p1] up till fifteen in secondary school [S3], “before moving on to the senior phase of the curriculum in S4 to S6.” (Education Scotland, n.d.-a, para. 1). During this first stage of education, schoolteachers follow the eight Curriculum Areas within the Curriculum for Excellence. The history subject, categorised as “People, past events and societies” broadly comes under Social Studies, wherein students “develop their understanding of [how] their environment ... has been shaped” through “learning about other people and their values, in different times, places and circumstances” (Education Scotland, n.d.-b, para. 1). With no set national curriculum, teachers in Scotland are free to develop their own subject contents and term schedule meaning that each school in Scotland covers different topics under the Social Studies umbrella throughout these early years of education.

Contextually, Scottish secondary schools are for students aged 11-18 (Smith et al, 2021, p. 2). A 2021 survey that sampled 20% of all Scottish secondary schools found that history becomes an optional subject after the “first or second year of high school” in 86% of sampled schools (Smith et al, p. 1). It is estimated that “considerably less than 50%” of students continue studying history after it becomes optional (Smith et al, 2021, p. 4). Therefore, the BGE curriculum represents “the totality of the historical education that some 50% of Scottish children receive” (Smith, 2019, p. 443). Studying history for just 1-2 years either restricts most students to a small number of history topics taught in depth or a larger number of topics taught at a more general level.

Consequently, students learn about Scotland’s historic involvement in the British Empire, Transatlantic Slave Trade and the perpetuation of racial inequality at different levels of comprehensiveness, if at all. Mullen (2020) points to “the teaching in Scottish secondary schools, or lack thereof” as “one foundational aspect of the ‘amnesia’ of historic connections with slavery” (p. 30). While Education Scotland produced benchmarks, which outline that students are expected to study “groups in past societies who experienced inequality” and be able to “explain the

reasons for the inequality and evaluate how groups or individuals addressed it” (Education Scotland, 2017, p. 18), these benchmarks do not specify any particular groups who suffered inequality nor who perpetuated the inequality. Smith et al (2021) further found that only 36% of participating schools teach about the British Empire, with those that do cover this topic “five times more likely to be taught in one or two lessons than as a discrete topic.” (p. 1). Similarly, “The transatlantic slave trade is not widely taught in the BGE of Scottish schools: 37% of schools do not teach it at all”, while only 16% of schools taught this subject as a “sustained topic” (Smith et al, 2021, p. 7-9). This shows that most Scottish schools either avoid or overlook post-colonial narratives. Therefore, a significant portion of Scottish people visiting museums will likely be unfamiliar or unaware of key terminology, practice or parties involved with topics surrounding colonialism, the British Empire and slavery.

In Western society, Seixas outlines “two traditions in history education which he terms ‘historical thinking’ and ‘historical consciousness’” (cited in Smith, 2019, p. 444-445). Whereas historical thinking prioritises “organisational concepts such as change, causation and evidence”, historical consciousness focuses on “how individuals in the present relate to the past ... and considers the ways in which the past intrudes into the present, and how individuals comprehend and assimilate these intrusions.” (Seixas cited in Smith, 2019, p. 445). Only two out of seventy schools sampled focus on the perspectives of “those who were colonised” (Smith et al, 2021, p. 1), so the other schools overlook a key aspect of historical consciousness. In providing narrow viewpoints that ignore certain perspectives, schools are depriving their students any opportunity to understand and relate to the real experiences of those primarily affected by Scottish involvement while minority students who may have links to these former colonies are denied a chance to relate to their own heritage. Furthermore, the lack of non-British perspectives prevents an opportunity for students to recognise how legacies of colonialism and empire shape modern society that they live in. Smith et al (2021) conclude that,

with the short amount of time spent on these topics of colonialism, empire and slavery, schools “run the risk of superficiality and oversimplification” (p. 9). So, many Scottish students likely only have a limited understanding of the key people, events and themes.

As of 2023, however, the Scottish government produced “Anti-Racist Curriculum Principles” as part of their curriculum reform, which include focus on learning about “Scotland’s role in ... trans-Atlantic enslavement and colonial histories, and their impact today”, “past and present events in a way that amplifies under-represented perspectives and stories” and “privilege and power, and to unlearn bias, prejudice and divisiveness.” (Education Scotland, 2023, p. 1). Although current and future students will benefit from the revised curriculum principles, Scottish people who graduated prior to these changes still often have an underdeveloped understanding of Scottish involvement in colonialism, empire and slavery. While there has been progress, most Scottish people were taught a faux-neutral history and left school with minimal exposure to these “under-represented perspectives” or understanding of how past issues relate to modern society.

Whereas Scottish school education is formal and influenced by benchmarks or anti-racist curriculum principles to provide an assessable standard of learning, learning in museums is largely nonformal.

Nonformal education often “has a voluntary dimension”, is “‘bottom up’, focusing on the learner and their needs”, and involves “emotional, social and behavioural elements”, unlike the compulsory, top-down and primarily cognitive style of formal education (Johnson & Majewska, 2022, pp. 4-5). This is because visitors decide what they pay attention to and gravitate towards the style of learning that is most appealing to them, whether that be reading labels, observing visual or audio components, or interpreting the display or themes.

Nevertheless, nonformal learning “may complement formal curricula” (Johnson & Majewska, 2022, p. 4). Giblin et al (2019) argue that schools using the museum as a resource would “generate a more nuanced picture of the British

Empire beyond the textbooks.” (p. 481). Indeed, an independent steering group reported that, based on consultations “with almost 5,000 individuals” throughout Scotland, museums working in “collaboration with schools is deemed essential to ensure that the next generation are empowered to learn from Scotland’s legacies” and combat racism (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022a, pp. 6-10). Therefore, museum and school learning can intersect because museum education can be both shaped by gaps in formal education and address these gaps with “nuanced” supplementary learning materials outside the classroom setting. In his report for Glasgow Museums, Greenwood (2021) cites Agarwal to argue that “The history taught in British schools is essentially ‘a sugar-coated, whitewashed version which focusses on the “good bits”” (p. 28). This shows that Glasgow Museums have also acknowledged these gaps and biases in Scottish education, allowing these museums to avoid repeating this mistake.

Zeller categorises “museums articulating colonial memory” as taking on an “education and social role” (cited in Prianti & Suyadnya, 2022, p. 229). With the reforms in formal school education, museum approaches to post-colonial narratives must be mindful of the current generation’s active engagement with post-colonial themes and the missing context from older generation’s incomplete understanding of Scotland’s past. This awareness of different visitors needs to inform how museums depict themes of colonialism, empire and slavery to make them accessible and comprehensible to all, and whose perspectives are included in the curatorial process and represented in the displays. These diversified perspectives can allow learners to develop Seixas’ “historical consciousness” by linking past and present people’s experiences with racial inequality. This would thereby raise awareness for social issues among visitors and highlight how their behaviour can be informed by these legacies of colonialism.

Macdonald (2006) outlines two domains of educational theory: “theories of “learning”, wherein the mind passively absorbs or actively engages with information, and “theories of knowledge”, wherein the mind either acquires or constructs knowledge about phenomena (p. 345). Passive acquisition of knowledge comes through “didactic, expository” means, passive construction comes through “stimulus response” (Macdonald, 2006, p. 346). Active acquisition comes through discovery, while active construction comes through constructivism (Macdonald, 2006, p. 346). Macdonald (2006) notes that museums have shifted “from being mainly a source of authoritative knowledge to providing opportunities for individuals to learn in their own ways” (p. 320). The findings chapter will analyse which educational theory informed *Curating Discomfort’s* and *City of Empire’s* approaches to museum pedagogy.

## 20. Scottish Museums and Post-colonialism

Sieg (2020) argues that “in a context where colonial history is not consistently integrated into school curricula and public spheres, museums have become key sites for decolonizing myths of national genius and European superiority.” (p. 216). Although these reforms have begun to take effect, many Scots have already gone through the formal education system without learning about Scottish colonial history. Consequently, frequent references to the lack of formal education on this subject are made in Greenwood’s 2021 report, with one respondent warning that “Unless you actively go out and search for new things you can’t learn about this. You don’t get taught this sort of stuff in school - not even the basics.’” (p. 10). So, Glasgow Museums became aware of these gaps in knowledge. Museums can provide this needed source of learning because decolonised museums provide visitors with diverse perspectives that counter these “myths of national genius and European superiority” previously upheld by the Scottish school system.

Since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Scottish museums have promoted several high-profile initiatives, programmes, events and exhibits to promote post-colonial narratives. For example, Morris and Bond's 2018 "'Transnational Scotland' project focused on objects of imperial trade" across multiple Scottish museums, which "led to changes being made to object labels and other interpretive materials, new commissions, and events that all formed part of a wider decolonising initiative that is still ongoing today" (Bond, 2024, para. 4). Although this source is a magazine it is credible because Bond is a professor at the University of Oxford and a published academic with firsthand experience in co-ordinating this post-colonial museum project. So, Bond's account shows that there has already been success in reinterpreting objects, new collecting practices and continuing decolonial change in a network of Scottish museums. This project was however temporary, meaning it no longer exists as a resource to be studied or visited.

Most significantly, "The 2020 BLM [Black Lives Matter] movement was also the catalyst that pressured many national institutions and local authorities to conduct reviews on the identification of slavery and the wider British Empire within their sites and collections." (McKee, 2023, para. 9). This meant that many Scottish museums began to address their own colonial links, whether through repatriation, reinterpretation or complete redesign (Bond, 2024, paras. 7-9). Additionally, two significant reports were produced that suggest how Scottish museums can progress as post-colonial institutions. Greenwood's 2021 report used public responses and post-colonial theory to offer guidance on how to address "the legacies of slavery and empire in Glasgow Museums" (p. 1).

Rather than museums providing a supposed neutral "balance sheet" as discussed by Rasch (2019), Greenwood's (2021) report found that "many research participants felt that museums, as well as formal education, have been complicit in hiding, obscuring or failing to include the 'whole picture' of our history" (p. 19). Consequently, Greenwood also highlights a "lack of trust in museums as sources of learning" because they perpetuate "injustice" in presenting incomplete, unbalanced views. Instead, Greenwood (2021) reports that "Many respondents feel

that it's important to present histories of slavery and empire as a key part of Glasgow's history", and identifies three possible approaches that could be taken to decolonise museum interpretations:

“[1.] that there should be a dedicated space to engage with these topics; [2.] that there shouldn't be a dedicated space and it should be interwoven throughout existing spaces; [3.] and lastly, that these histories deserve a dedicated space and they should be embedded in existing spaces ... it does seem that most people were in favour of there being a dedicated space.”

(pp. 34-

35)

This shows a clear interest in museums incorporating post-colonial narratives, even if one approach is not unanimously agreed upon. These approaches have been considered in this research study's analysis of how its case studies present post-colonial narratives.

Similarly, in 2021 a government-sponsored Empire, Slavery & Scotland's Museums project was undertaken by National Museums Scotland (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022b, Recommendations section, para. 1). This steering group made recommendations for “how Scotland's involvement in empire, colonialism, and historic slavery can be addressed using museum collections and museum spaces.” (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022b, Overview section, para. 1). This was based on “7 independent pieces of consultation and more than 40 workshops ... consulting with almost 5,000 individuals nationwide” that took place in 2021 (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022a, p. 6). Museums Galleries Scotland recommendations are:

- “Scotland should create a dedicated space to address our role in empire, colonialism, and historic slavery. A new organisation should be created to lead this work.
- Museums should ensure anti-racism is embedded in their workplaces and public spaces.
- Museums should involve the people of Scotland in shaping their work through co-production, to promote cultural democracy and participation for all.
- Museums should commit to research, interpret, and share the histories of Scotland’s links to empire, colonialism, and historic slavery.
- Museums should support efforts to promote and embed race equality and anti-racism in the curricula in a meaningful, effective, and sustainable way.
- Scottish Government should demonstrate their support for restitution and repatriation of looted or unethically acquired items in Scottish collections.”

(Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022b. Recommendations section, paras. 2-7)

This was significant because these recommendations were “fully accepted by the Scottish Government” in 2024, resulting in the steering group and Museums Galleries Scotland being granted initial “funding of £200,000 in 2023/24 ... to begin work addressing the recommendations” (Scottish Government, 2024. paras. 1-5). This signified the first step in enacting systemic post-colonial change throughout museums in Scotland, spearheaded by “the lead body for the delivery of Scotland’s Museums and Galleries Strategy 2023-2030. Written with, and for, all of Scotland’s museums and galleries” (Museums Galleries Scotland, n.d-b, para. 1).

Moreover, McKee (2023) argues that “recognising the evidence of Scotland’s direct involvement” in colonialism, slavery and empire is only the first step to “linking the legacies of Scotland’s imperial past to present-day social discourses around inclusivity and identity” (para. 10). This is reflected in the steering group’s recommendations because they advocate for “equality and anti-racism in the curricula” and “cultural democracy” in museum practice, thereby including all

people in the museum hierarchy and diversifying perceptions of Scottish identity. Palmer argues that “Museums have had a central influence on how Scotland has created our national story, and should be supported to do so in ways that critically engage with our imperial, colonial, and slavery histories.” (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022a, p. 13). The implementation of these recommendations in museums throughout Scotland would fulfil the need for a unified stance against coloniality among Scottish museums because democratic, decolonial and anti-racist action shared by all Scottish museums would redefine the faux-neutral national story and set the example on how to address legacies of colonialism to other European countries. Similarly, governmental support for repatriation negotiations will ensure that all museums seek meaningful relationships with source communities and avoid making tokenistic gestures that extend the “story of ... colonial violence” that Hicks warned against in the above Section 14.

Kassim argues that certain museums cannot decolonise because, as colonial institutions, “they will only end up co-opting decoloniality” (cited in van Broekhoven, 2019, p.5). Until Scotland establishes a new organisation and dedicated space to address the country’s history, museums should be open to scrutiny to avoid appearing noncommittal to decolonising democratically. The Hunterian and Kelvingrove were indeed open to this study examining the curation processes for and educational approaches of *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire*.

## 21. Gaps in the Literature

The literature that I have reviewed thus far has focused on Scottish museums’ links to colonialism and authorised heritage discourse, the emergence of post-colonial practice and post-colonial initiatives, and Scottish responses to legacies of colonialism and future post-colonial work. However, there is a gap in this literature examining permanent post-colonial fixtures in Scottish museums that have recently emerged, particularly those in museums in Glasgow. *Curating*

*Discomfort* and *City of Empire* are examples of these recent changes in museum interpretation. Although there are document sources outlining the aims for, process behind and contents of *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* provided by the Hunterian and Kelvingrove or people involved, there is an absence of literature focused on analysing either of these two cases due to how recently they opened to the public.

There are examples of current post-colonial projects outside Scotland. Macdonald (2022) highlights how the Museum of US' virtual exhibition *Colonial Legacy: The Museum's Façade* interrogates the "interconnected colonial history" of nine European men found at the museum entrance and ends by "initiating a pause for reflection" through asking a series of questions related to the visitor's own position in society (Macdonald, 2022, p. 13). Although there is no single, universal formula for post-colonial action in museums (Giblin et al, 2019; Macdonald, 2022; van Broekhoven, 2019), this example shows that other post-colonial projects have opted to focus on both the museum and visitor's role in addressing colonial legacies in society, thereby achieving the educational and social role of the museum. However, as a virtual exhibition, it does not decolonise the physical space in the museum. The findings chapter will examine whether the educational/social functions exemplified here are also found in *Curating Discomfort* or *City of Empire's* approaches to presenting post-colonial narratives in a Scottish context.

Recent reports, academic and professional writing and past post-colonial initiatives show that there are many potential approaches to depicting post-colonial narratives in the museum, with each having potential pitfalls. This includes being unwilling to repatriate objects, separating political and cultural spheres, temporary and superficial decolonisation, and failing to include narratives from colonised peoples' perspectives.

The recency of *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* means that both projects represent the practical, physical implementation of emerging approaches in post-colonial thinking. This study fills the abovementioned gap in knowledge by

investigating how these two museums present post-colonial narratives. This was achieved by analysing the content on display to discern what themes are addressed, which of Greenwood's approaches were used and how learning is framed using Macdonald's (2006) educational theories. Moreover, this study gauged to what extent authorised heritage discourse was decolonised and how new perspectives were incorporated. The analysis of these cases offers insight into the strengths and weaknesses afforded by these new post-colonial approaches and possible implications for future post-colonial museum projects.

## 22. Why Glasgow?

This study focuses on two museums in Glasgow because Glasgow was “once the self-proclaimed Second City of Empire” in Britain (Glasgow Life, n.d.-a, Our Anti-racism Work section, para. 1). Museums in Glasgow are central to a post-colonial shift in Scotland because the city's museums are most directly implicated in Scotland's historic connection to colonialism, empire and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Moreover, Glasgow Museums' new partnership with “the National Museums Scotland [2022] Reveal and Connect project, to carry out a survey and evaluation of African and Caribbean collections across Scotland” (Glasgow Life, n.d.-a, Researching the Collection section, para. 4) shows how the addressing of colonial legacies in museums in Glasgow has helped to kickstart a nationwide shift in museum's attitudes towards their collections. Moreover, Glasgow Life is a network of museums, which means that the organisation's goals are shared across multiple Glasgow sites and visitor experiences can be connected by recurring topics and themes such as post-colonial narratives. Likewise, the Hunterian aims “to become the benchmark Scottish institution for university museum practice on research and on contemporary topics such as the legacies of colonialism and Empire and will share our expertise widely in the sector.” (The Hunterian, n.d.-b, p. 7). This shows how the Hunterian has ambitions that extend beyond Glasgow, which aims to set

the example for other museums on how to integrate post-colonial practice into museums outside the Hunterian. Notably, no Scottish museums signed the Universal Museum declaration, so these recent developments show that Scottish museums have taken clear steps to countering the coloniality by making networks that share anti-racist agendas.

Moreover, the Kelvingrove and Hunterian are Hunterian “situated in Scotland’s most ethnically diverse city” (Hunterian Glasgow, 2023, 0:15). So, both museums had access to a diverse range of perspectives that they could involve and a wider audience to share new post-colonial narratives with.

### 23. Context for *Curating Discomfort* and *Glasgow - City of Empire*

The Kelvingrove and the Hunterian both adopted anti-racism stances. The Kelvingrove, as a member of the “Glasgow Life Museums is committed to being an anti-racist organisation” (Glasgow Life, n.d.-a). Similarly, the Hunterian’s *Curating Discomfort* represents the “start of an ongoing process, striving to embed anti-racist practice into every aspect of our work” (The Hunterian, n.d.-a, para. 1).

As racism “developed as a legacy of colonialism” (Glasgow Life, n.d.-a, Our Anti-racism Stance section, para. 1), anti-racism is inherently a post-colonial attitude because it is critical of a colonialist ideology.

The Hunterian is “The oldest public museum in Scotland” and “at the forefront of university museums around the world.” (The Hunterian, n.d.-b, p. 2). Therefore, the Hunterian’s dedication to becoming “an ethical institution which critically reflects on the past, is relevant in the present and contributes to a more equitable future for all” (The Hunterian, n.d.-b, p. 3) aims to set the example for anti-racist and post-colonial work for other museums to follow. The Findings chapter will assess whether how applicable this example is to other Scottish museums.

The Hunterian identify white supremacy, defined as “a political, economic and cultural system that centres white institutions and decision makers” as the key legacy of colonialism and facet of racism that puts museums “in a position of power” (Hunterian Glasgow, 2022, 0:49). This white supremacy is manifested in the lack of diversity found in museum staff and in narratives perpetuated through authorised heritage discourse. Likewise, Glasgow Life has recognised that certain “galleries, displays and narratives no longer reflect Glasgow Museums’ views or ambitions when it comes to tackling racism and addressing the legacies of slavery and empire”, which requires “change to meet our responsibility to become anti-racist.” (Glasgow Life, n.d.-a, Our Anti-racism Stance section, para. 3).

Correspondingly, the Hunterian committed to “Increase our diversity and inclusion to better represent the world we live in, recruiting, learning from and supporting staff, volunteers, partners, source communities and audiences accordingly.” (The Hunterian, n.d.-b, p. 8). This shows that the Hunterian was already genuinely committed to anti-racist practice rather than tokenism prior to opening *Curating Discomfort* because it seeks to improve diversity at all levels both within and in association with the museum. As outlined in the Hunterian’s strategic plan, these new voices and partnerships will enable the museum to “co-curate new narratives, opening up to reflection and debate.” (The Hunterian, n.d.-b, p.5). The first of which being *Curating Discomfort*.

Similarly, Glasgow Life states that “Our collection does not stand still. We are continually evaluating new objects and adding to the collection” to include different perspectives from “people affected by slavery, imperialism and racism” (Glasgow Life, n.d.-a, New Collecting section, para. 1). Therefore, both museums have expressed a clear aim to address colonial legacies and introduce post-colonial narratives from new perspectives into their exhibit spaces. This research assesses whether these aims have been fulfilled by their flagship *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* projects.

The background, theories, debates and reports reviewed above contextualised my analysis of *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire*. The case study findings address and fills the research gap in knowledge by identifying how and with who museums in Glasgow present post-colonial narratives. The following methodology chapter outlines how this research was carried out.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 24. Context

The purpose of this research is to determine the ways in which two museums present post-colonial narratives and assess the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches.

My research questions are:

- 1). How do these museums present post-colonial narratives?
- 2). Who has a say in how post-colonial narratives are told within these museums?
- 3). What are the strengths and weaknesses of these post-colonial projects as tools for learning?

This research answers these questions by gathering and triangulating primary and secondary data to analyse the learning material produced by the two museums.

This chapter presents the rationale for the research approach, the research setting, the research samples and data sources, the data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations, and limitations alongside countermeasures.

### 25. Rationale

This research is necessary and timely because post-colonial narratives have become increasingly relevant to learning in Scotland and to Scottish national identity. Therefore, research on how museums present these narratives can offer useful guidance on how these museums can improve their displays as tools for learning.

The research conducted in this project is qualitative and in the form of case studies. The cases in the Hunterian and Kelvingrove were specifically chosen because the educational purpose of the *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* exhibits have not “been previously investigated” by researchers due to their recency, which classifies this study as a “‘revelatory’ case” (Ashley, 2021, p. 136).

My research paradigm is constructivist. Waring (2021) argues that a constructivist ontology rejects the idea of one objective reality in favour of multiple subjective realities, which leads into an interpretivist epistemology because differing perspectives “provide indirect indications of phenomena” meaning that knowledge comes through interpretation (p. 16). This research draws on interpretations from multiple perspectives, including primary data gathered from museum staff and visitors and secondary data from online resources involving those associated with either museum.

Interpretivist research “cannot understand why people do what they do, or why particular institutions exist and operate in characteristic ways, without grasping how those involved interpret and make sense of their world” (Hammersley, 2012, p. 22). The different perspectives of those involved in *Curating Discomfort and City of Empire*, as well as the behaviour of those visiting these exhibits, provide context through which I address the research questions. Herein, the experiences of those involved in the curation of post-colonial displays establish which voices had a say in how post-colonial themes are framed and reveal the justifications for focusing on specific themes and learning techniques that are contrasted with visitor behaviour to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the exhibits/displays.

Moreover, Coe (2021) argues that power relations are “central to understanding social phenomena”, so “Research should aim to understand individual cases and situations and to focus on the meaning that different actors bring to them” (p. 6). Racial power structures, as a legacy of colonialism, have dictated how both museums previously ignored their links to colonialism, empire and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. So, this research investigates to what extent “different actors” were able to overcome this power structure and apply “meaning” to *Curating Discomfort and City of Empire* through post-colonial narratives.

## 26. Participant Groups

This research has two separate participant groups: interview participants and observation participants.

A case should be ‘described or defined within certain parameters’, which can include the ‘people involved in the case’ (Creswell & Poth, 2018, 97). Therefore, curatorial staff from Glasgow Life were interviewed and provided an insight into why and how post-colonial narratives are explored in *City of Empire*. These participants were purposely selected based on their involvement with the case studies, contacted via email and provided with an information letter about the research project.

Due to scheduling conflicts, no members of the Hunterian’s curatorial team were available to interview. Instead, members of the Hunterian visitor experience team were consulted to give their feedback for *Curating Discomfort* based on their practical experience with visitor learning. These participants agreed to be interviewed after meeting during my observation study. They were also provided with information letters.

Interview participants were asked in consent forms whether they consent to being identified. To avoid these participants being identified by their voice, the audio recordings were transcribed, with the transcript preserved in an anonymous form using pseudonyms (Hammersley, 2021, p. 61). Meanwhile, the audio recordings were kept secure and are to be erased upon completion of the study. Those that consented are named in this dissertation paper. The “concern for security” regarding data is key (Seidman, 2019, p. 112). Important data has been kept in three separate and safe places, protected by a password: (1) my work laptop (which is password protected and kept in a safe place); (2) a separate password protected device, kept under lock and key; and (3) on the university and a personal cloud server that are accessible only to me.

The second group of participants are individual visitors to either museum. Lanir et al (2016) note that the “two measures *attraction power* and *holding power*

are often used in museum studies” to “capture how thoroughly visitors were engaged with an exhibit” (p. 315). Visitors were passive participants that allowed me to determine the extent to which *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* capture visitors’ attention and engage them through post-colonial narratives. Visitors were informed at both sites of the study taking place and had the opportunity to not participate. Visitors at the Hunterian also had access to an “information sheet explaining the study” (Yalowitz & Bronnenkant, 2009, p. 55). The Kelvingrove declined permission to provide visitors with an information sheet to avoid disrupting visiting experiences any more than necessary.

Participants were not chosen based on any characteristics nor was any Special Categories of Personal Data gathered at any point, so complete anonymity was guaranteed. Instead, participants were selected at random.

## 27. Method of Collecting Data

This project is based on empirical research wherein I gathered ethnographic primary data. Empirical research ‘takes phenomena ... as its starting point, and attempts to represent them as data which can be analysed. In this way, empirical research aims to represent, describe and understand particular views of the educational world.’ (Coe, 2021, p. 9). This research aims to explore the phenomenon of emerging post-colonial themes in Scottish museum exhibits and analyses why and how it is used in the context of museum visitor learning.

For secondary data I consulted documented sources, such as podcasts, videos and interviews involving community/co-curators from each museum to understand the collaboration process in creating post-colonial exhibitions. Hammersley (2012) notes that qualitative methods include “analysis of documents in the manner of the historian or the literary critic” (p. 22). Although these documents have already been “produced previously and by others, rather than in the process of the research or by the researcher” (McCulloch, 2021, p. 269), they are still relevant to the research because they are outlets for those involved in *Curating Discomfort* or

*City of Empire* to reflect on their experiences during either project. The numerous resources online and onsite at the two museums grounded the research by contextualising the museums' public agenda and aims, which contributed to answering the first two research questions and provided a platform for further primary research. As these sources are taken from the museum websites or affiliate websites, they are considered hybrid documents because they "have gone through an editing process that may alter some of their characteristics" and may portray said museums more favourably (McCulloch, 2021, pp. 269-270). So, these sources were treated critically and contrasted with the unfiltered primary data to test if the experiences correlate.

I interviewed curators from Glasgow Life about *City of Empire* and Visitor Experience staff from the Hunterian about *Curating Discomfort*, which produced data addressing each research question. The interview questions were designed to delve beyond the information already made available in documentary sources, which avoided wasting participant's time by repeating questions that they have already answered elsewhere and instead explored more nuanced themes or talking points relevant to the research questions. My set questions excluded leading questions so that participants were not influenced into giving a desired response. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for further questions on relevant topics. The interviews were set to be no longer than 1 hour, although one did run over by 14 minutes.

The interviews with curators discussed the aims for, reasoning behind, challenges to and perceived impact of these displays. Also discussed with curators were the curation processes, how the experiences of new perspectives influenced this stage. The interviews with visitor experience staff discussed learning approaches, target audiences and visitor responses. Two interviews were conducted over Teams, while four took place in person. One interview was cancelled due to the participant's busy schedule. All interviews took place at a date and time that was most convenient for the participants. The sample interview questions, and interview transcripts are available in the appendices (Appendix 4-9).

Mears (2021) argues that interviews can “also function to clarify or triangulate data obtained through other means” (p. 232). The data gathered from interviews was contrasted with the critically analysed documentary material and observation data to provide a fuller picture of how post-colonial narratives are addressed in museums, by who and to what extent they attract and hold visitors’ attention. Similarly, the observation results were triangulated with analysis of the learning material in both museums to indicate the strengths and weaknesses of each case’s approach to presenting post-colonial narratives as a tool for learning.

Observations took place over two weekend in June (the Hunterian on 22-23<sup>rd</sup>, the Kelvingrove on 29-30<sup>th</sup>) and focused on the third research question. Observations involved timing and tracking visitors as they navigated *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire*. Observations were conducted during each museum’s opening hours. I monitored visitors using a number of “variables for timing and tracking studies”, including “stopping behaviours” (such as time in area, number of stops, length of stops), “other behaviours” (such as visit path, social interactions and response to interactive or audio-visual elements), and “situational variables” (such as date/time of visit, crowding and special events being held) (Yalowitz & Bronnenkant, 2009, pp. 49-50). These variables were monitored to determine whether the aims for the displays have been realised in practice. Kelly and Bartlett (2002) recommend timing and tracking observations “when specific sections of an exhibition need to be reviewed” because it is “Easy to collect, collate, analyse and report data” (p. 3).

For the timing and tracking study, I decided to “draw an “imaginary” line at the entrance ... and select every 3<sup>rd</sup> visitor that crosses the line” to ensure “as “random” an approach as possible” (Yalowitz & Bronnenkant, 2009, p. 51). To avoid excessive amounts of data, I predetermined that no more than 40 participants overall be tracked. Overall, 34 participants were tracked, with 17 participants observed for *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* each. The visitor observation study took place with the least possible interference or conditioning by the researcher.

Yin (2017) explains that “The logic underlying the use of multiple-case studies is the same. Each case must be carefully selected so that it either (a) predicts similar results ... or (b) predicts contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons” (p. 54). So, I made a tally of how often all visitors engaged with each zone of *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* to determine which displays attracted and held visitors’ attention most. This was done to test whether dedicated exhibits or interventions into existing exhibit spaces are better at holding visitor’s attention throughout a visit and determine which case (and approaches) are more effective at engaging visitors. Engagement was determined as stopping and reading labels, rather than simply looking at the objects. Due to the number of people tallied, these stops were not timed.

Moreover, I recorded all themes depicted in *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* to compare what narratives are conveyed in each museum. Similarly, I noted the approaches used by *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* to determine how they intend to stimulate visitor learning. This was contrasted with both the interview and observation data to gain an understanding of what aspects of museum learning work in theory and in practice. This was done to determine the strengths and weaknesses of both sites’ approaches as tools for learning.

## 28. Data Analysis

As I gathered data from two sites, I used a multiple case studies design. The data analysis follows an embedded analysis design, wherein each unit is analysed (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 100). The units of analysis are the two museums, curators and visitor experience staff, and visitors. Ashley (2021) argues that “To generate rich data rigorously and in a way that reduces subjectivity and increases construct validity, case study research tends to rely on multiple methods and sources of data collection.” (p. 137). Therefore, I gathered, triangulated and analysed multiple sources of data to this end.

For documentary material and interview transcripts, I used codes organised into hierarchies as a means of “categorizing the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas” (Gibbs, 2018, p. 54). These codes were analysed by looking for patterns and variations (Gibbs, 2018, p. 65), wherein key themes relevant to the research questions were highlighted. I began by reading and identifying “relevant categories” in the text, then refining and relating these categories, and finally identifying the “core category” that related to the “other categories” (Strauss and Corbin cited in Gibbs, 2018, p. 71). These themes were recorded in a table to “facilitate cross-case comparisons” (Gibbs, 2018 b, p. 112) and show whether the themes correspond between the multiple cases or are unique to one case. I manually analysed the data to ensure my interpretation remains consistent throughout the dissertation. I did not apply statistical analysis as this is a qualitative case study, which rarely calls for statistical analysis (Yin, 2017, p. 34).

Moreover, the data from my observations of the exhibit spaces have been represented in tables to identify any ““hot” and “cold” spots in the exhibition” as well as “visitors’ circulation” and “interaction with exhibits” (Lanir et al, 2016, p. 315). These results were compared to interview responses to determine whether their aims or criticisms of approaches to engaging visitors through post-colonial narratives were reflected by visitor behaviour.

## 29. Ethical Considerations

Hammersley (2021) outlines three overarching ethical considerations: “minimising harm”, “protecting privacy” and “respecting autonomy” (pp. 58-64). There was no harm to participants during my interviews nor in my observations because I did not physically intervene at any point. Due to the anti-racist subject matter, I gave my interview participants the option to access my questions prior to the interview to avoid causing them any discomfort. I provided all interview participants with consent forms to ensure that they were fully informed,

comprehended the nature of the study and willingly agreed to take part (Cohen et al, 2018, p. 121).

I also minimised harm by protecting the privacy of participants who did not want to be identified. As specified by the University of Malta ethical approval self-assessment form, I did not record or refer to any salient participant characteristics or Special Categories of Personal Data. Moreover, I specified that I would only observe adults “who appear to be 18 years or older, in order to avoid informed consent and ethical issues” during the ethics review process (Yalowitz & Bronnenkant, 2009, p. 51).

In my ethical approval application, I flagged up three areas that needed elaboration before being approved: 1). identifiable participants, 2). opt-out recruitment, and 3). co-operating institutions. I justified my methods by outlining how:

1. I protected participant’s identity using pseudonyms in both the transcript and research outputs. Participants were given an option to review their transcript.
2. The use of notice signs and information sheets for observation participants allowed visitors to decline participation. The Kelvingrove granted permission for the research to take place on the condition that no visitor be approached, even to obtain verbal consent to be observed, as this would disrupt their visiting experience. Due to the notice sign, visitors still had full knowledge that they may be observed without any personal data being taken. Conversely, visitor experience staff in the Hunterian obtained verbal consent from visitors and agreed to inform me of anyone opting out.
3. The Hunterian and the Kelvingrove, as co-operating institutions, were contacted and who I corresponded with.

To respect autonomy, I provided all participants and co-operating institutions with the option to not participate or withdraw from the research. At one point, the Kelvingrove considered not participating in the study but renewed

their permission for my observation study to proceed after their condition on verbal consent was met.

After gathering data, I ensured that all reports are credible and accurately represent the results found (Cohen et al, 2018, p. 139). Seidman (2019) argues that “Most important is that reducing the data be done inductively rather than deductively” (p. 117). Therefore, I did not lead conversations towards desired answers, which resulted in many interesting themes being raised that were not directly linked to the research questions.

### 30. Limitations and How I Reduced Them

Originally, I planned to also assess how successful the two museums are at engaging visitors in learning about post-colonial narratives using visitor surveys and a focus group of schoolteachers. However, it became clear that focusing on both the aims of the museum and responses of the visitors was beyond the scope of this research. There is an opportunity for further research on visitor responses to post-colonial narratives in a follow-up study.

Mears (2021) underlines that during research, it is important to “disclose anything that might have subjectively affected your work and explain what you did to limit its negative impacts.” (p. 236). A significant issue that I faced was the delay in receiving a study unit code for my ethical approval application, which was resolved when my head of department and I contacted the Chair of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee who gave permission for the application to proceed. This ultimately delayed my gathering of data to June, by which time I was expected to have already begun producing data analysis.

Hedges (2021) cites how “The act of observing ... changes the phenomenon being observed in substantial ways”, which threatens the validity of data (p. 31). To reduce this, I attempted to be as unobtrusive as possible to avoid impacting anyone’s visit to either museum. This ensured authentic visitor behaviour and minimised the Hawthorne effect, wherein “participants may knowingly or

unknowingly alter their behaviour as a result of being observed” (Goodwin et al, 2017, p. 1323).

A key limitation with interviews is that “Achieving a level of deep reflection usually requires multiple interviews with each participant” because “The first responses you hear undoubtedly will be the oft-told tale, the frequently shared story of events, or happenings without much depth, detail or reflection” (Mears, 2021, p. 234). I resolved this by using the information already made publicly available by the museums as a starting point to delve into themes that have not already been discussed at length.

Yin (2017) notes that “An embedded design ... has its pitfalls. A major one occurs when the case study focuses only on the subunit level and fails to return to the larger unit of analysis.” (p. 52). My use of a table to record data from each unit of analysis resolved this because it allowed me to draw overarching parallels and bring the cases together to answer each research question.

A limitation to the timing and tracking observation study was that I did not accurately record the length of time visitors stopped during their visit. Rather than report inaccurate data, I have omitted these findings. Instead, I have focused solely on the tracking data (number of stops, visitor pathways etc.), which has revealed hot and cold spots in the layout of the two installation spaces.

Kelly and Batlett (2002) note that a timing and tracking observation is “limited as [it] doesn't give an overall picture of visitor use” (p. 3). I could not hear discussions amongst visitors or determine how thoroughly visitors read the labels, so I do not know the extent to which the post-colonial themes were comprehended by visitors. For future studies, I would recommend surveys and interviews with visitors to further find out whether engagement led to learning, to what level this learning was retained by visitors and the extent to which post-colonial narratives now inform visitors' understandings of Scottish history.

### 31. Summary

Ultimately, this qualitative research was conducted to learn how recent projects in Scottish museums address post-colonial themes. This study used interviews and document sources to determine how the Hunterian and Kelvingrove chose to present post-colonial themes and who was involved. I ensured that my research minimised harm, protected privacy and respected autonomy for all participants. Meanwhile analysis of the displays and teaching approaches, and observations of visitors indicated the strengths and weaknesses of each site's approach to the topic of post-colonialism in museum education.

I used hierarchical codes to organise my data and detect themes. I organised themes into a table to enable cross-case analysis. Similarly, I used maps and tables to represent data from observations. This made it simple to recognise, analyse and report patterns and tensions. I have identified several potential limitations, including threats to my research methods, which I addressed.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### 32. Context

This chapter presents the findings of this research followed by an analysis of these results to explore key themes and answer this study's research questions:

1. How do these museums present post-colonial narratives?
2. Who has a say in how post-colonial narratives are told within these museums?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these post-colonial projects as tools for learning?

Data has been collected from interviews with museum staff, observations of visitor activity and supplementary documentary sources produced by or involving relevant museum staff.

The topics covered in this chapter were identified in the codes relating to the units of analysis outlined in Section 28. This chapter first reports the results, which is followed by analysis in the discussion.

This chapter first investigates the extent to which both cases decolonised the curation process and dismantled authorised heritage discourse by identifying who was involved in the curation process, what role they occupied and what degree of authority they exercised over interpretations. This chapter then addresses what approaches each museum takes to present post-colonial narratives and how museums promote learning. van Broekhoven (2019) acknowledges that when decolonising, museums “are allowed to fail” in places if they remain “flexible on process but hard on principle.” (p. 6). So, throughout this chapter, *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* are critiqued to identify what affordances the approaches of these projects have as tools for learning and areas for improvement. This was based on interview answers and data gathered from observations of visitor behaviour.

The anonymised interviewed participants from Glasgow Museums' curatorial teams are hereafter referred to as Curator A or B. Anonymised interview

participants from the Hunterian visitor experience team are hereafter referred to as Patterson and Visitor Experience employee A, B, and C.

### 33. Diversity

#### 33.1. Results

In 2020, Glasgow Museums created the new role of Curator of Legacies of Slavery and Empire, hiring a BAME candidate (Glasgow Life, 2020). This role was introduced to develop “a programme of community engagement and collaborative research” and the curation of “new displays to clearly demonstrate the impact slavery and empire had on” Glasgow (Glasgow Life, 2020, para. 3).

Participant Curator B explained that *City of Empire*'s curatorial team was made up of co-curators as part of the *Our Shared Cultural Heritage* project, wherein “funding was specifically attached to increasing the access and representation of young people of South Asian heritage in museum spaces”. According to Curator B, the co-curators hired had to “fit that demographic” of “early 20s”. Curator B acknowledged that an “intergenerational, interethnic, intersectional group” would have provided a greater range of experiences to draw from but the young changemakers' inexperience “meant they were really good at challenging us” and asking questions.

Likewise, the Hunterian introduced a Curator of Discomfort during its stages of enacting institutional change (The Hunterian, 2020). The intervention is introduced by the Museum's *Declaration of Discomfort*, which states the Hunterian's attitude towards addressing colonial links. This declaration states that “Any object can be interpreted from a number of perspectives, and there is never just one story to tell” (Figure 6.). The Hunterian “invited a group of six people to form the Community Curators group” and develop *Curating Discomfort* (The Hunterian, n.d.-a, Phase 3 section). These people were contacted by the Curator of

Discomfort (Yeaman, 2022, May 6, 1:01). The group members were “from different geographical backgrounds who have been in Glasgow for different lengths of time” and included “academics, community activists, social justice campaigners and educators” (The Hunterian, n.d.-a, Phase 3 section). This meant that the curatorial team was “multiracial, it’s intersectional, multi-generational and they bring a breadth of experience” (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2022, 21:55).

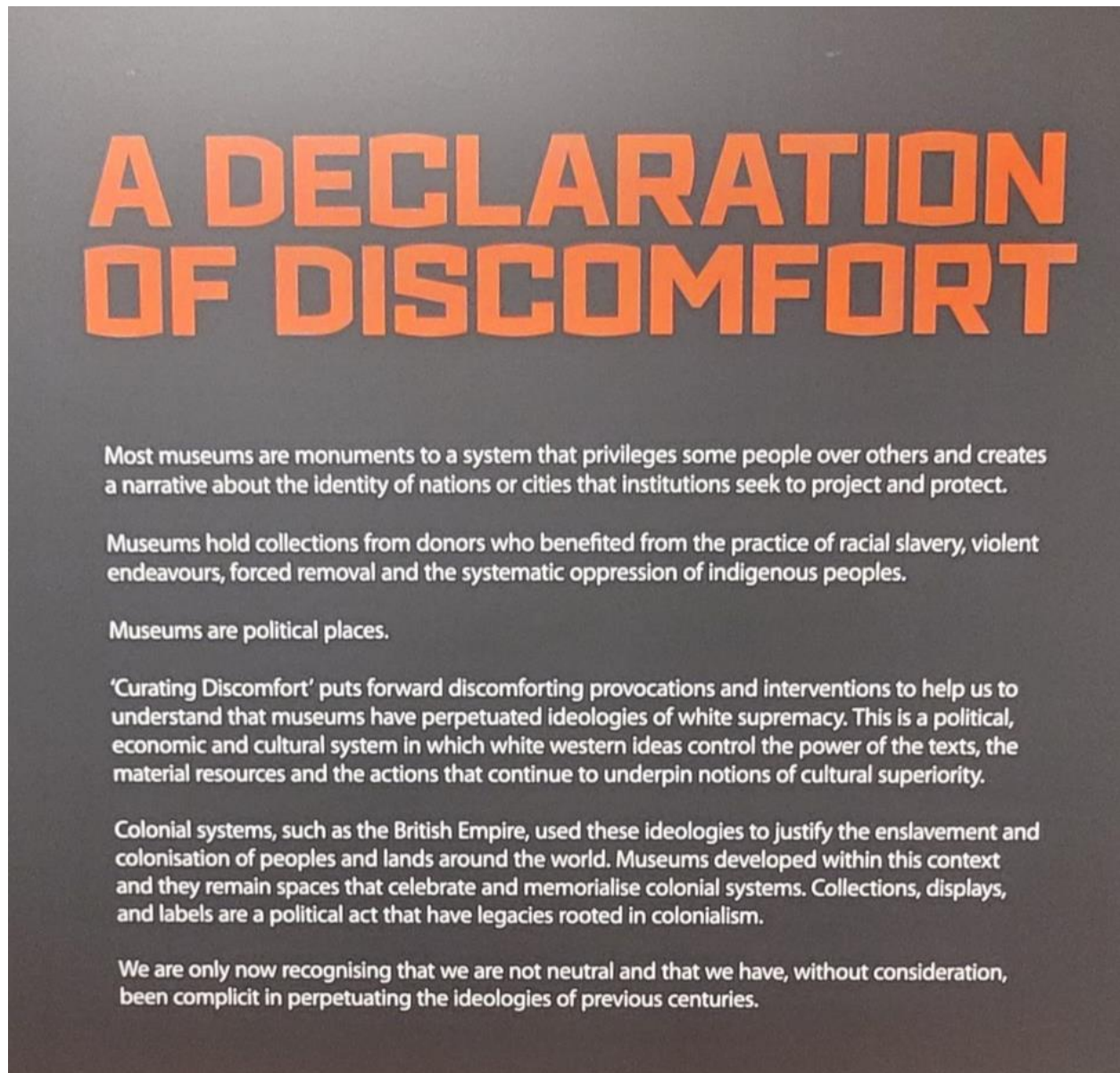


Figure 6. *Curating Discomfort: A Declaration of Discomfort* panel (photograph by author)

### 33.2. Discussion

Although the Community Curators and co-curators were only temporary, the hiring of BAME professionals in permanent curator roles represented a progressive step towards decolonising because both museums gave a platform to new perspectives that are on an equal standing to their other curators. Moreover, both

museums showed genuine commitment to decolonising and dismantling authorised heritage discourse because they included outside voices in the curation of flagship projects. In building the curatorial teams, these new curators put into practice Fraser & Jim's (2018) suggestion that a curator can act as an "agent of social change" (cited in Abraham, 2022, p. 71), as outlined in Section 15., because they linked the museums to wider communities.

*A Declaration of Discomfort* signals that the Hunterian has accepted and acted on Bernhard's principle of decolonising knowledge because it favours multiple interpretations over the notion of one objective history. Moreover, the range of demographics and experiences represented in just six curators shows that the Hunterian wanted as many perspectives to be given voice as possible.

By contrast, the Kelvingrove's scope was more limited in terms of diversity of experiences and different cultural backgrounds. However, the co-curators' ability to challenge the Kelvingrove staff evidences an inclusive and collaborative environment.

## 34. Gaps in Curation

### 34.1. Results

Both cases feature languages other than English in their displays. Two prominent examples are Iqbal's poem presented in Urdu and English in *City of Empire* (Figure 7.) and *Curating Discomfort's* label for Thomas Brown of Lanfine, which introduces the Māori "Patu Onewa (stone club)" (Figure 8.).

Participant Curator A, however, argued that *City of Empire's* "major flaw" is that in places "it's other people telling African people their people's story without ... giving the African voice any airplay". For Curator A, "*City of Empire* is a very traditional way to interpret" because it prioritises what curators "want to say", which led to some misinterpretations of objects. Moreover, Curator A argued

that the contemporary objects' artists or source communities can always be consulted because "We have the Internet, we have e-mail, we've got telephones."

Similarly, participant Visitor Experience employee C criticised the intervention because "it doesn't even engage with the communities that are in the displays", noting for example that "the Māori, the Aborigines, they now have legal government level representation and they're very accessible". On the other hand, one Community Curator was "an Asante person" and wrote about an Asante gold-dust box (Figure 9.) (Yeaman, 2022, May 20, 8:25).

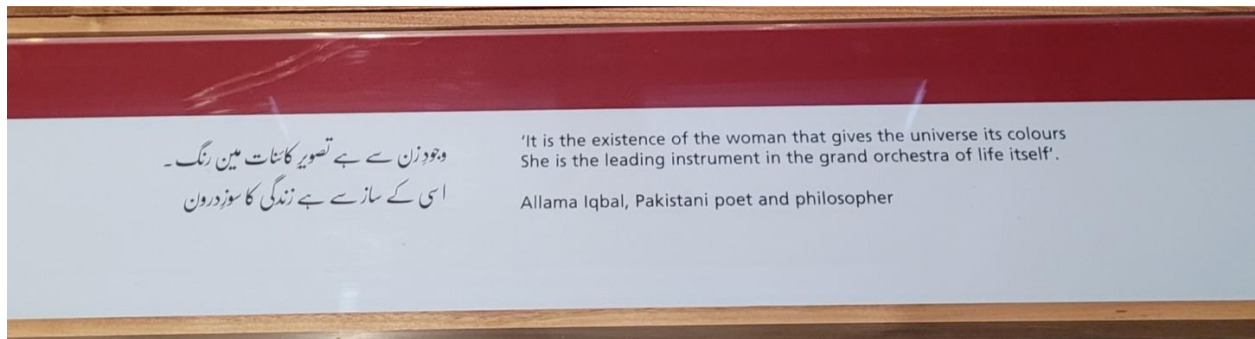


Figure 7. *City of Empire*: Iqbal poem label (photograph by author)

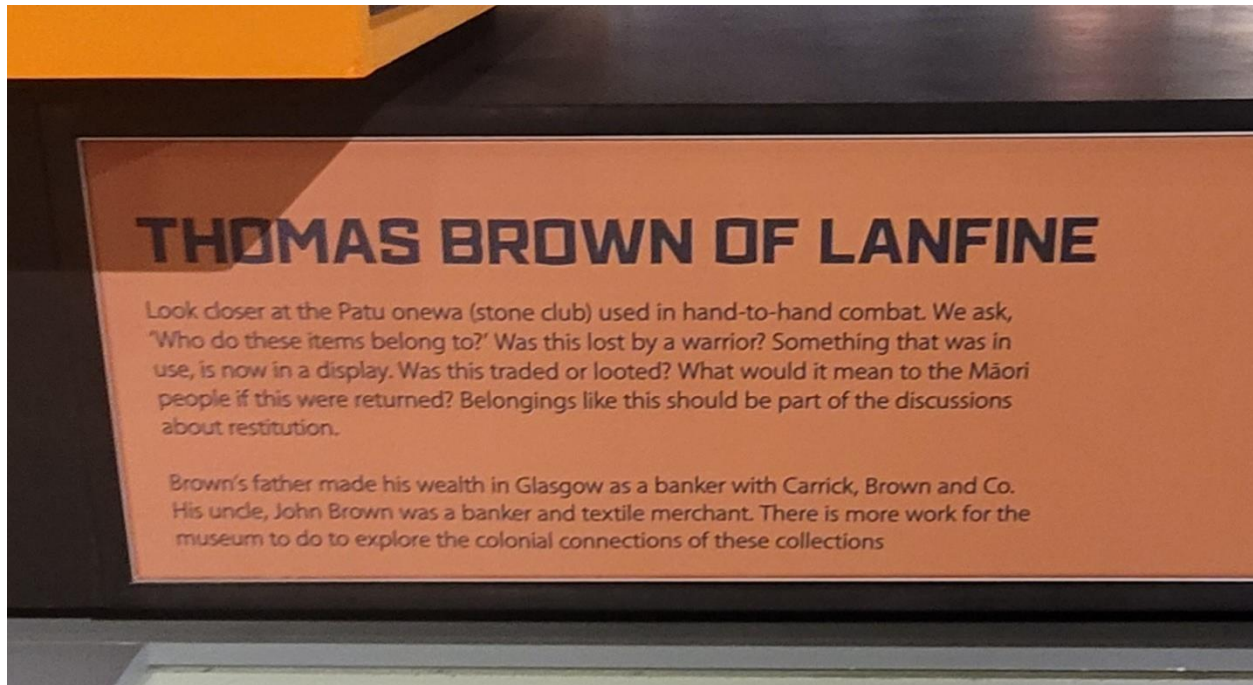


Figure 8. *Curating Discomfort*: Brown intervention label (photograph by author)



Figure 9. *Curating Discomfort*: Gold-dust box (photograph by author)

### 34.2. Discussion

The use of Iqbal's poem and the Māori language do, to some extent, counter the colonial language that originated in object documentation because the source communities' language is represented and precedes any English translations.

However, while the co-curators and Community Curators represented a more diverse range of perspectives in the museum structure, both museums still repeated their past mistake of prioritising the curatorial voice over those of the

source communities. This negatively affects visitor learning because some learning material is still filtered through an outside perspective that does not directly correspond with or include the source community's own interpretation or knowledge. To avoid misrepresenting objects, the next stage in decolonising for both museums is to consult source communities when interpreting objects with colonial links. *Curating Discomfort* did achieve this for one of their objects but failed to apply it elsewhere in the intervention.

Curator A's criticism of the curation process reveals a divergence of opinion between the two Glasgow Museums curators. Whereas Curator A openly criticised aspects of *City of Empire*, Curator B is less critical because they only admitted to encountering challenges after some probing from the interviewer, which they still span into a positive outlook on the process.

## 35. Curation Process

### 35.1. Results

The Community Curators worked together “Over six months ... to curate an intervention” (The Hunterian, n.d.-a, Phase 3 section). Herein, the Community Curators looked for objects that “would stand out to us and the reasons why they would stand out to us” as part of wider minority communities (Yeaman, 2022, May 6, 3:03).

One Hunterian staff member acknowledges that the staff initially ignored the Community Curators' input during a “follow-up session where we sort of pretended as if that hadn't happened”, which was in itself “telling and embarrassing and discomforting” (Hunterian Glasgow, 2023, 5:32). However, this issue was resolved, with the Hunterian staff and Community Curators working in a “collaborative environment where we're cross-pollinating our knowledge and expertise” (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2022, 21:14). As a result, one Community Curator stated

that *Curating Discomfort* was not done to “tick a box” (Hunterian Glasgow, 2023, 3:46). Another Community Curator highlights how “beautiful” it was that their “voice was able to come through” in the object’s interpretation (Hunterian Glasgow, 2023, 2:31).

Participant Curator B recalled how the selection process involved “talking about the history of objects ... that might relate to the key themes of the project” and considering “what could be displayed”. The co-curators selected objects based on their own interest such as Glasgow’s links to the Transatlantic Slave Trade, “South-Asian art forms” and “the environmental devastation caused by British colonisation” (Jamal & Govanhill, 2024, February 26, paras. 3-5.). Participant Curator A, however, highlighted that “a problem” was that the project was “siloeed and kind of structured”. Conversely, Curator B found that “co-curation definitely really helped” by “adding those voices”, which will remain “after the project's done” and the co-curators have left.

### 35.2. Discussion

Divergences in outlook towards the curation process for *City of Empire* were once again noted between Curator A and Curator B. Curator A’s comments did not indicate how this structure inhibited the co-curators. However, the co-curators’ own accounts that they were able to choose objects related to their areas of interest does indicate that there was a degree of freedom in selecting objects. Moreover, the range of topics on display shows that there was some flexibility within the broad overarching theme of the project.

The length of time given to the Hunterian team further shows that *Curating Discomfort* was not a superficial project because they were given an appropriate amount of time to prepare and implement the permanent intervention. Moreover,

the object selection rationale departed from authorised heritage discourse because the curators used their different cultural backgrounds and interests to determine what was displayed.

The Hunterian curator's self-reflection on the "embarrassing" follow-up session contrasted with the positive relationship the Community Curators had with museum staff shows that the Hunterian recognised and rectified their behaviour to empower the Community Curators. Although these positive comments were made in outputs produced by the Hunterian Museum, the inclusion of the "discomforting" anecdote does indicate transparency on the museum's part regarding its efforts to strengthen anti-racist practice.

Both curation processes appear to be largely democratic considering that they were dismantling longstanding intuitional curatorial practices.

### 36. Themes Addressed

Drawing on the curatorial teams' perspectives, both museums present multiple post-colonial narratives and themes. Several displays in *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* relate to a variety of shared themes, including the negative impact of scientific advancement, resistance to colonialism, intangible cultural heritage, collectors' colonial links, and colonial exploitation. By focusing on themes of resistance, both cases avoid the pitfall of focusing too much on the role of empire when displaying looted objects, as previously outlined by Hicks (2020).

One theme unique to *City of Empire* is focus on issues found in formal education regarding colonialism and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Most notably, *Curating Discomfort's Declaration of Discomfort* (Figure 6.) and *City of Empire's Colonial Miseducation* (Figure 10.) emphasise the narrative that deeply ingrained preconceptions based on racism and white supremacy remains a prominent legacy of colonialism.

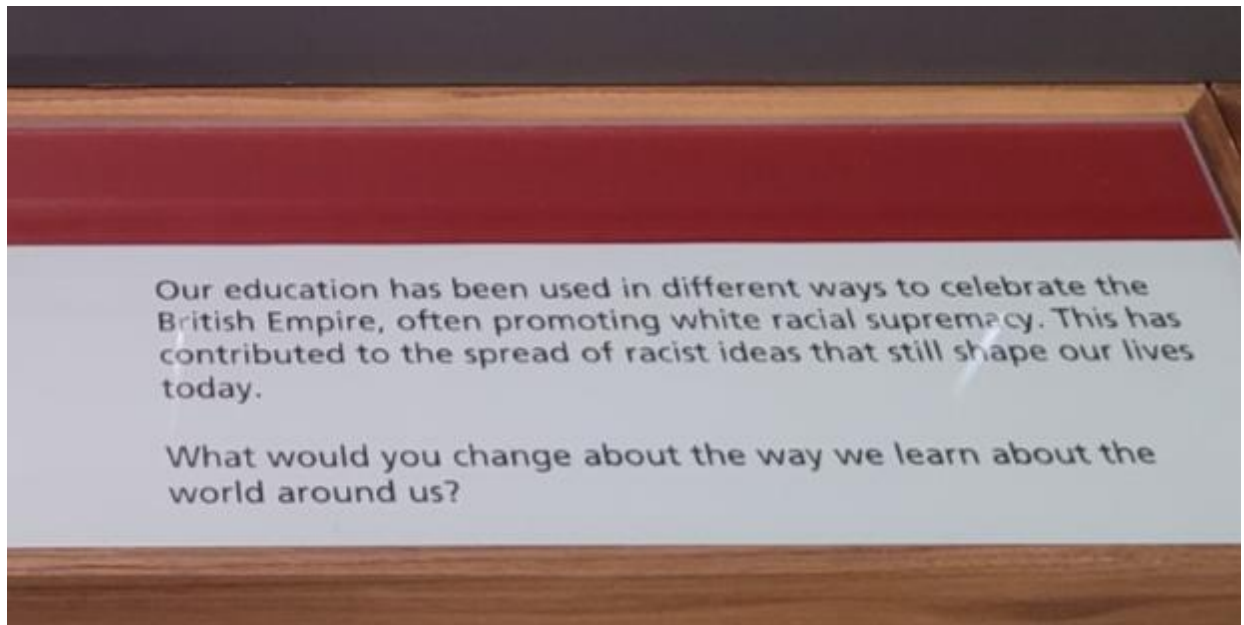


Figure 10. *City of Empire*: Colonial Miseducation label (photograph by author)

## 37. Neutrality

### 37.1. Results

In presenting post-colonial narratives, both museums take a clear political stance.

In *Curating Discomfort's* introductory space, the concept of museums as political institutions is directly addressed on four occasions (Figure 6., Figure 11.). *A Declaration of Discomfort* explicitly outlines that "Museums are political places." (Figure 6.). This declaration ends by reaffirming that museums "are only now recognising that we are not neutral and that we have, without consideration, been complicit in perpetuating the ideologies of previous centuries." (Figure 6.).

*City of Empire* does not use the words 'political' or 'neutral' in its panels or labels. However, participant Curator B argued that by incorporating perspectives of the "enslaved or colonised" and highlighting "how horrific slavery and empire were", the Kelvingrove "have taken quite a clear stance where we sit politically".

Moreover, the opening two sentences of the Glasgow - City of Empire panel state that “Recognising the legacies of slavery and empire is essential to understanding the city you see today. The British Empire created many injustices that shape Glasgow’s past and present.” (Figure 12.). *City of Empire* was “developed with support from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights and Museums Galleries Scotland.” (Figure 12.).

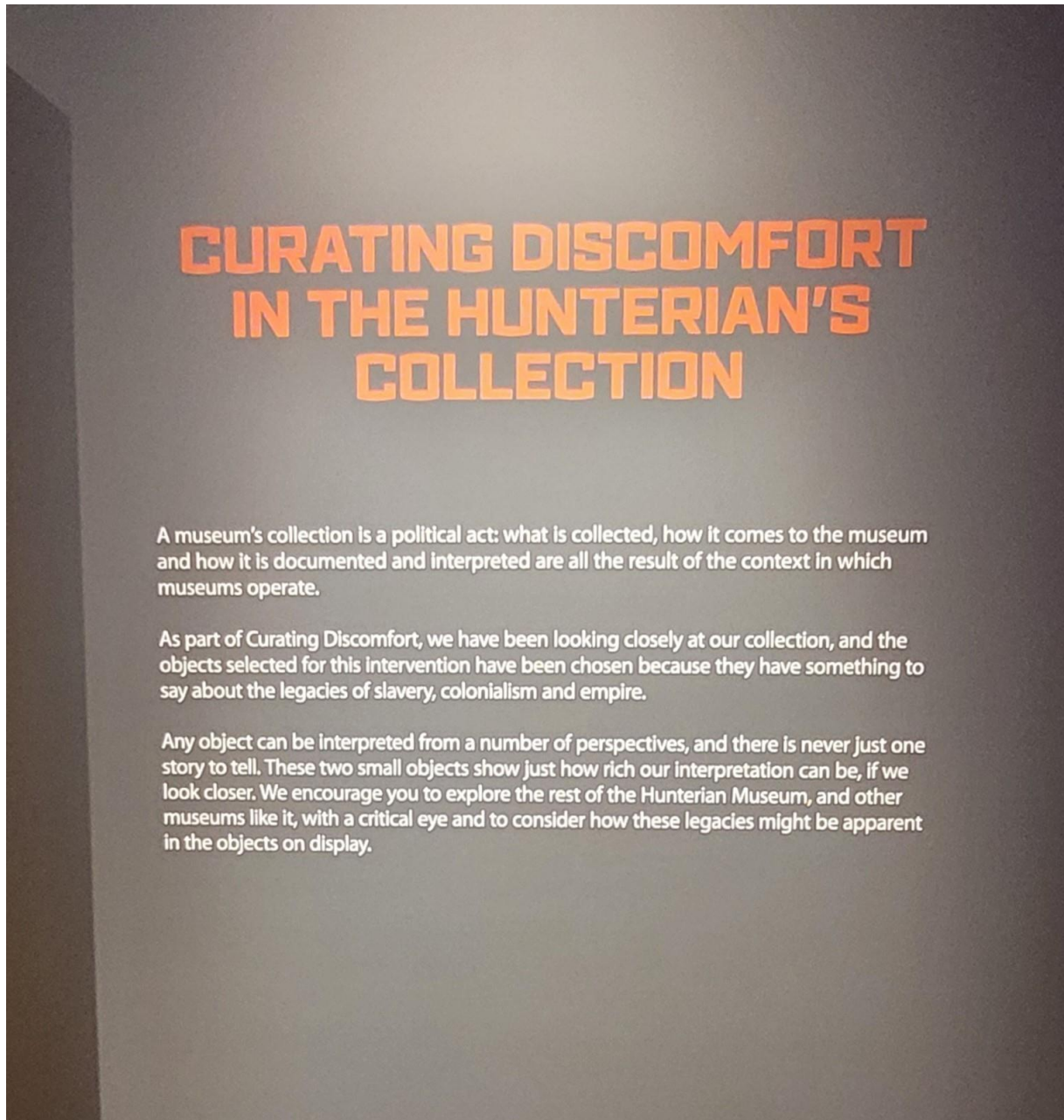


Figure 11. *Curating Discomfort*: Hunterian Collection panel (photograph by author)

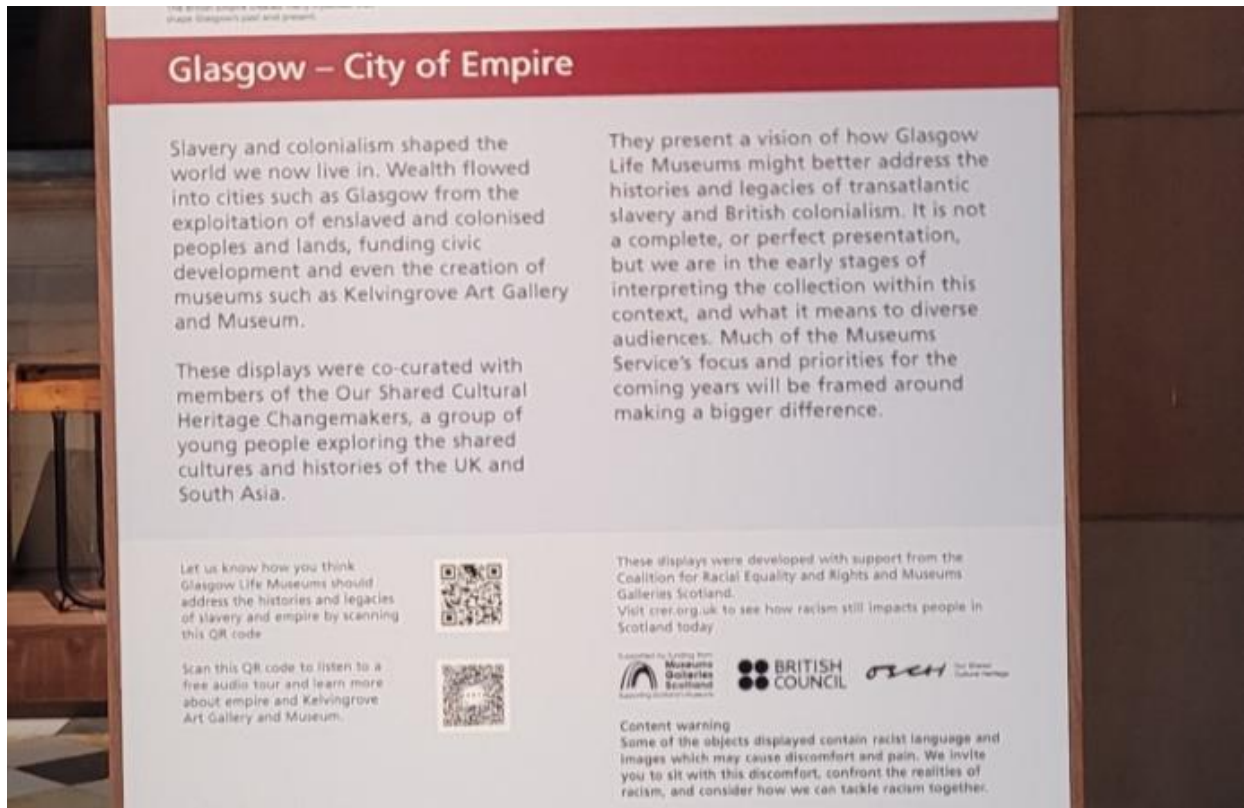


Figure 12. *City of Empire*: Glasgow - City of Empire panel (photograph by author)

### 37.2. Discussion

*Curating Discomfort*'s unequivocal statements concur with the numerous sources cited in Section 14. that argue that museums cannot be neutral. *Curating Discomfort* defies this neutrality fallacy because it refuses to separate Said's concept of the "cultural" sphere from the "political" sphere. Moreover, this first short statement is a single line isolated from the other paragraphs within the declaration, which makes the message most emphatic and noticeable to the visitor.

*City of Empire*'s inclusion of oppressed peoples' perspectives also distances the museum from a neutral stance upheld through authorised heritage discourse. The panel's reference to "Glasgow's past and present" rejects the claims that colonialism is a thing of the past, as previously outlined by Popp et al. (2019). *City of Empire* had significant backing from several high-profile equal rights and museum organisations, which strengthened its status as a genuine effort to

decolonise. This collaboration also situates the Glasgow Life network into a larger, nationwide network of anti-racist museums and activist organisations.

Although both museums are political for presenting post-colonial narratives, they differ in how they present them.

38. Interventions and Exhibits

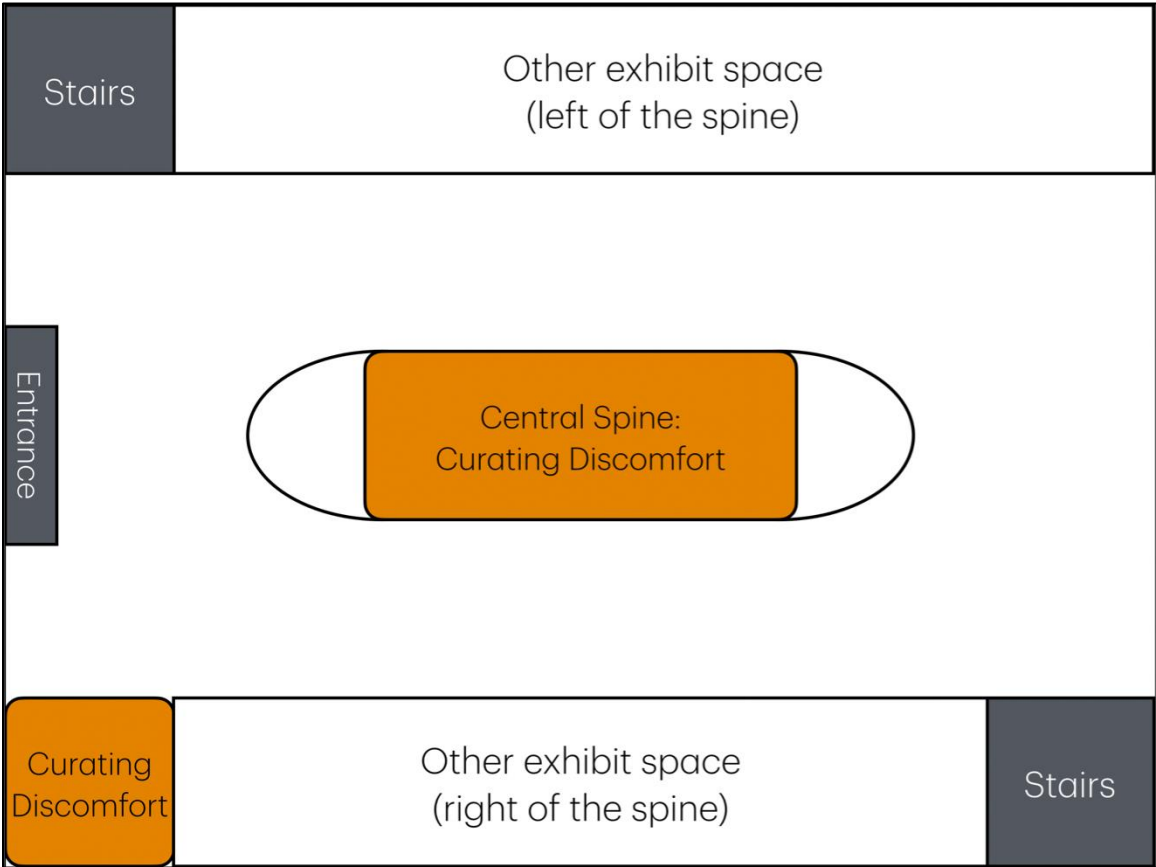


Figure 13. Schematic layout of the Hunterian’s Main Hall, including *Curating Discomfort* (drawn by author)

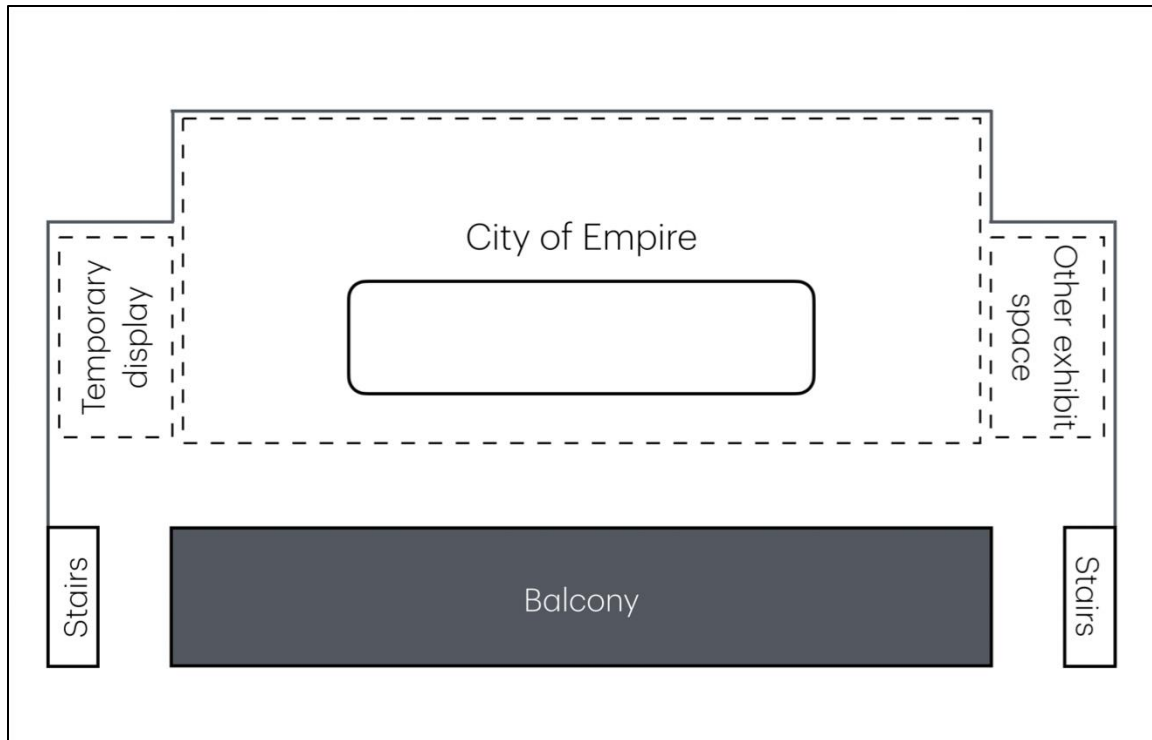


Figure 14. Schematic layout of the Kelvingrove's South Gallery, including *City of Empire* (drawn by author)

### 38.1. Results

In Section 20. Greenwood (2021) identified three ways to present post-colonial narratives: 1). In a dedicated space, 2). embedded throughout the museum, 3). a combination of both. Whereas the Kelvingrove implements the third option, the Hunterian subverts these approaches.

The Hunterian defines *Curating Discomfort* as “an intervention, not an exhibition” (The Hunterian, n.d.-a, Phase 3 section). Located in the Main Hall, *Curating Discomfort* begins with an introductory section (Figure 13.), including panels outlining the aims of the intervention, a label and two coins exemplifying how this intervention interprets objects, and a mind-map and video outlining the curation process.

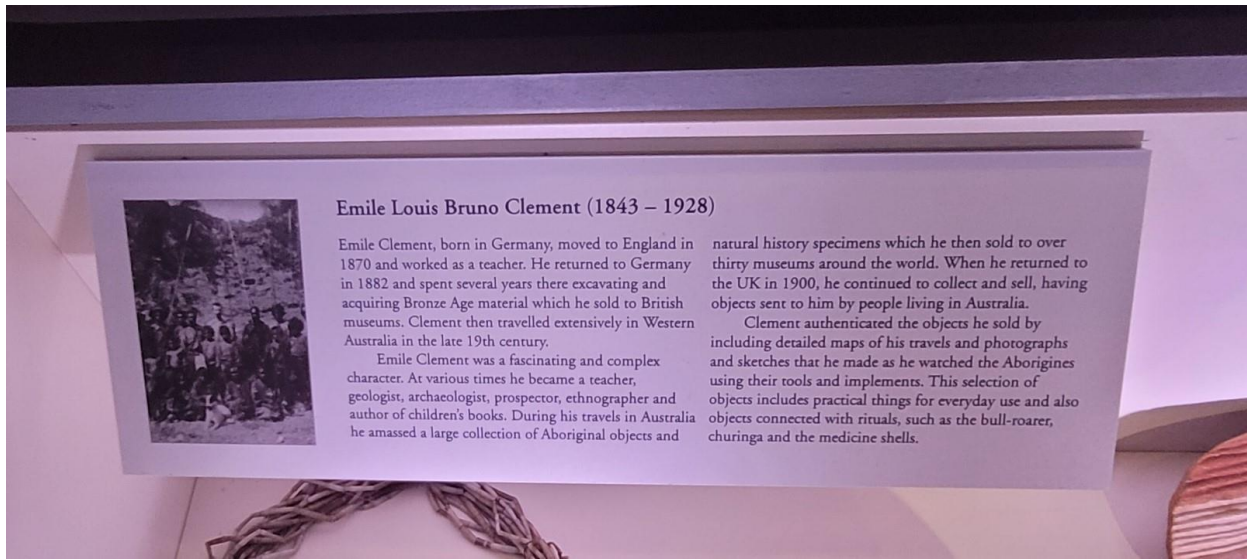


Figure 15. *Curating Discomfort*: Clement original label (photograph by author)

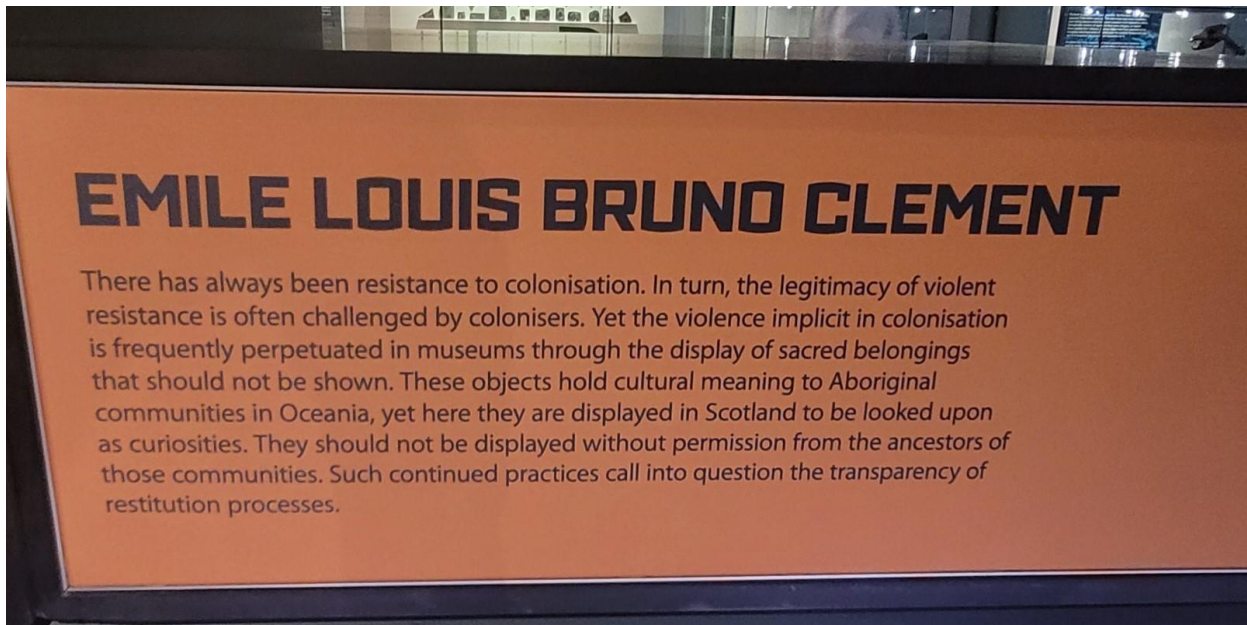


Figure 16. *Curating Discomfort*: Clement intervention label (photograph by author)

*Curating Discomfort* is mainly framed around the central spine in the main hall (Figure 13.), which features nine objects/labels selected and written by the Community Curators. The intervention also presents post-colonial narratives

through new labels contrasted with existing labels. This contrast is most apparent in the labels discussing Clement; the original label describes Clement as “a fascinating and complex character” who “amassed a large collection of Aboriginal objects and natural history specimens which he then sold to over thirty museums around the world.” (Figure 15.). The new label instead states that “the violence implicit in colonisation is frequently perpetuated in museums through the display of sacred belongings that should not be shown” (Figure 16.).

One Community Curator described their activism work as intending to “disrupt white supremacy” (Hunterian Glasgow, 2023, 4:39). The Hunterian’s pre-existing labels largely exclude non-white, non-male perspectives; of the named donors investigated in *Curating Discomfort*, eight out of ten are men.

Conversely, *City of Empire* is a permanent exhibit located in the Kelvingrove’s South Gallery (Figure 14.). *City of Empire* “builds on the existing interventions” in the Kelvingrove that highlight “legacies of empire” (Glasgow Life, n.d.-c, para. 4). The exhibit features a range of historical objects, art pieces, labels, videos and art installations that incorporate different perspectives and cultural expressions.

Although *City of Empire* followed Kelvingrove’s exhibit “style guide”, participant Curator B noted that *City of Empire* is “different to what Glasgow museums has normally done” in terms of subject matter. Curator B explained that traditional museum approaches focus on either the collector, artist or “style of painting”, while *City of Empire* explores “how objects related to people or wider stories of place and historic events or contemporary events in a history or a city”.

Participant Visitor Experience employee C criticised *Curating Discomfort* for often prioritising the intervention’s post-colonial “narrative over history”. This participant clarified that the intervention was “writing around objects that were

not necessarily suited to” post-colonial narratives, such as “Scottish pewter and brass”, rather than using other “objects in the collection that are absolutely a colonial legacy”.

Similarly, participant Curator A noted that “there was a post-colonial narrative imposed upon” several contemporary objects that misinterpreted the intention of the artist. Participant Curator B, however, explained that the project did not use looted objects to avoid undermining the empowering purpose for the exhibit.

### 38.2. Discussion

The Hunterian drew on the activist mindset because, rather than simply providing a new dedicated space or embedding post-colonial narratives within the museum, *Curating Discomfort*’s intervention stands beside and disrupts the existing interpretations. The variety of displays in the introduction offer a comprehensive overview of the intervention before beginning a visit. Moreover, the intervention labels’ orange colour scheme further sets *Curating Discomfort* apart from the pre-existing display and clearly marks where to find the new perspectives.

By bringing in new perspectives provided by BAME community curators, *Curating Discomfort* redefines the white/male dominated central spine space. Moreover, by contrasting new labels with the pre-existing ones, the Hunterian subvert the “balance sheet” argument noted by Rasch (2019). This is because the new labels do not replace the old labels but instead emphasise the imbalance and bias of seemingly neutral labels by exposing perspectives and interpretations that were previously excluded. For example, Clement’s original label’s use of “fascinating” frames Clement in a positive light while the vague use of “amassed” does not explain whether he collected objects ethically. The intervention label reframes Clement’s work and museum collecting as complicit in an exploitative system because it exposes the visitor to the “sacred” meaning the object has to Aboriginal people. This sheds light on how objects were collected, who they

originally belonged to and what meaning they had/have to the previously overlooked source community (albeit without consulting them). Therefore, *Curating Discomfort* reflects Young's (2020) guideline for post-colonial practice because it first analysed the collection, then genuinely intervened in the exhibition space to promote post-colonialist interpretations.

In embedding post-colonial narratives throughout the museum and opening a dedicated exhibit, the Kelvingrove ensures that all visitors have an opportunity to learn from post-colonial narratives to some degree. This allows any visitors that miss the *City of Empire* exhibit to still experience these post-colonial perspectives. Alternatively, those that do visit *City of Empire* can link these post-colonial themes to the intervention labels in other parts of the museum, which reinforces learning. The Kelvingrove's interventions differ from *Curating Discomfort* because they are not centred around a single space.

By linking colonial history to contemporary society, *City of Empire* invokes Seixas' principle of historical consciousness, as previously cited in Section 19. This allows those living in Glasgow to both understand and relate how their city is rooted in the wealth of empire and consider they are still implicated in racial hierarchies that emerged from this time.

The criticism that both museums impose post-colonial narratives on unrelated objects shows that there is room for improvement. To avoid these issues museums should ensure that the objects used in post-colonial displays are appropriate for the theme. Again, this can be achieved through consulting source community members, who can highlight their unique cultural heritage.

### 39. Observation Results

The following section shows how well these different approaches to presenting post-colonial narratives attract and hold visitors' attention.

Observations of visitor behaviour at the Hunterian and Kelvingrove took place 22-23<sup>rd</sup> and 29-30<sup>th</sup> June. A stop was counted as engaging with a label/video for longer than 10 seconds. The two spaces are split into zones; for listings of the specific displays found in each zone see 8.1.-8.2. in the appendices.

Due to an error made in how visitors were timed, I cannot give accurate figures for time spent in each zone, so these results are not reported below. The results for the number of stops are accurate, so my interpretations of visitor tracking data, number of stops and visitor pathways are trustworthy.

These results are also trustworthy because observations were made as the museums began to enter peak summer season and did not overlap with any public holidays. This gave me opportunity to see a high number of visitors engage with the case studies and track enough visitors to recognise trends, which would not have been afforded at other times of the year.

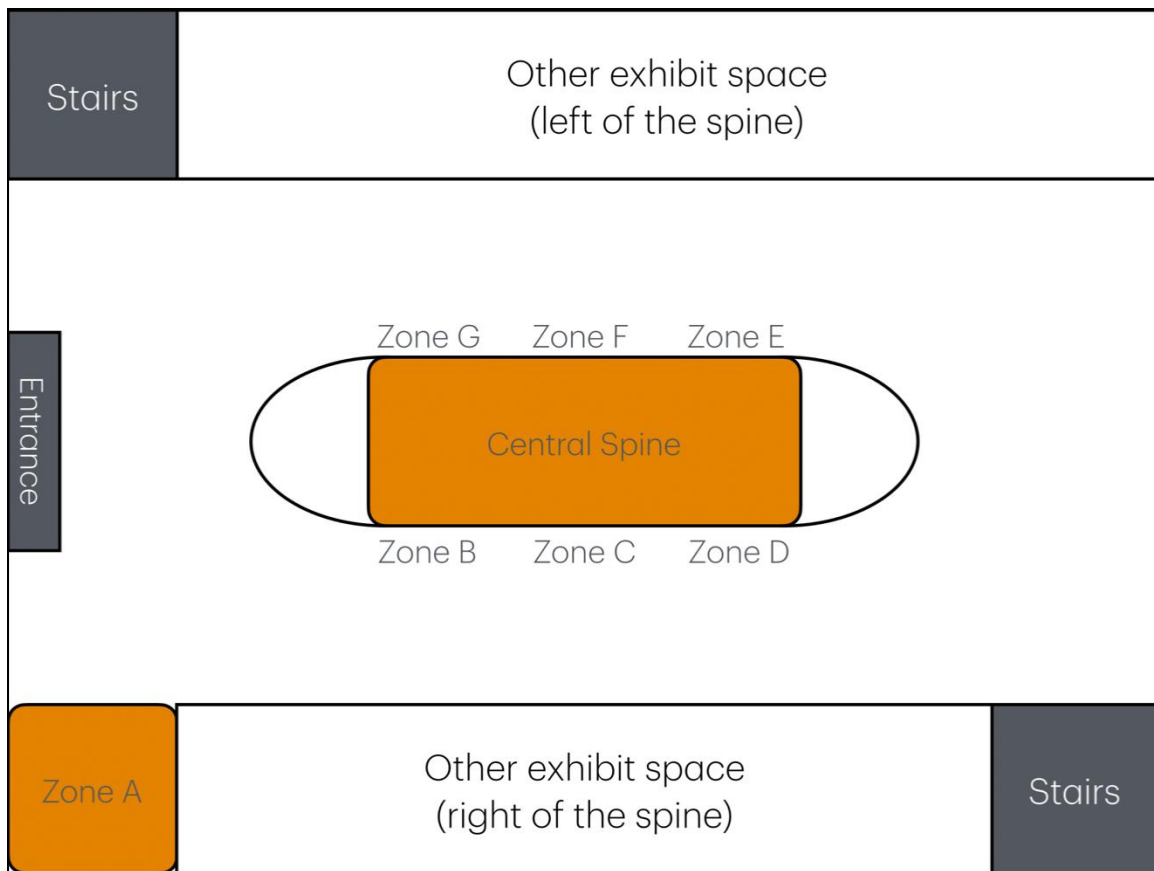


Figure 17. Schematic layout of *Curating Discomfort* zones (drawn by author)

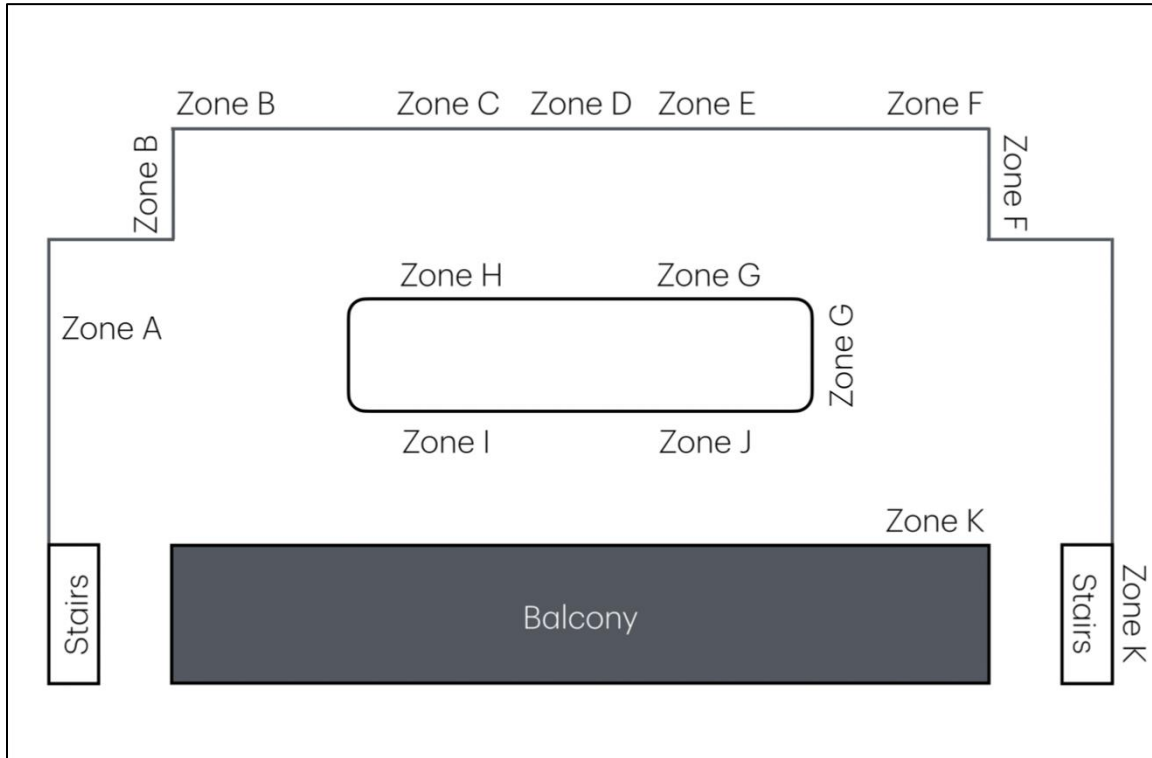


Figure 18. Schematic layout of *Glasgow - City of Empire* zones (drawn by author)

#### 40. Results for *Curating Discomfort*

Table 1. *Curating Discomfort* results

	Zone A	Zone B	Zone C	Zone D	Zone E	Zone F	Zone G	Total number of visitors observed
Total tracked stops	16	6	6	7	4	3	3	17
Total non-tracked stops	27	8	22	10	18	24	22	72

Tracked stops refer to randomly selected visitors who were followed throughout their visiting journey. Non-tracked stops refer to all visitors observed

stopping at any zone at any point. This was done to determine if the zones prompt tours or random stops more.

17 visitors were tracked throughout their visit, of which 3 completed a full tour of *Curating Discomfort*. An additional 72 visitors were observed stopping at different zones.

#### 40.1. Analysis

Zone A contained the most learning material with the highest word count, while zones B-G each contained intervention labels and a selection of Community Curator objects. A ‘tour’ is considered stopping at zone A and at least one zone either side of the spine (zones B-D and E-G) (Figure 17.).

Interview participant Patterson explained that *Curating Discomfort* was implemented around the central spine as the “focal point” of the main hall, so that visitors “can’t avoid it because you’ve got to go round it to view anything in the museum”.

The total stops along the central spine in the tracked observations show that engagement decreased during the visitor journey for *Curating Discomfort*. Whereas zones E-G attracted the lowest number of tracked visitors, they attracted significantly more non-tracked browsing visitors than zones B/D.

The tracking data showed that most tracked visitors deviated from the expected route for *Curating Discomfort*. The common visitor path for those starting with zone A was to continue towards the archaeology displays (right of the spine) and then continue up the right-hand stairs to the balcony. Due to the placement of the stairs adjacent to zone D and the exit, only two out of thirteen visitors who started at zone A visited the left side of the spine before exiting the Main Hall. Two tracked visitors started on the left side of the spine (zones E-G) and stopped at zone A; one decided to return to the spine to engage with zones B-G but the other left the Main Hall.

#### 40.2. Discussion

The drop in engagement from zone A to zone B in both tracked and non-tracked observations shows a lack of visitors moving from zone A to B, meaning that the introductory section (zone A) and central spine (zones B-G) are not clearly connected and do not encourage visitors to move linearly between zones. Indeed, seven out of seventeen tracked visitors never stopped at any other zones after zone

A. These visitors often left the main hall or stopped at other displays that were not part of *Curating Discomfort*. This also means that few visitors read zone A’s introductory panels and therefore lacked the context provided by the introductory panels while reading the post-colonial narratives in zones B-G, thus having an incomplete learning experience. While the spine is effective as a “focal point” for browsing visitors, it struggles to hold touring visitors.

The contrast in results show that zones C, E, F, and G attracted more browsing visitors than it attracted touring visitors because these zones have considerably more stops relative to zone A in the non-tracked tally than in the tracked observations.

To encourage more engagement, the introductory area needs to either be more clearly connected to the central spine or zone A’s content needs to be repeated throughout the central spine to reinforce the topic and intervention’s purpose to the visitor.

41. Results for *City of Empire*

Table 2. *City of Empire* results

	Zone A	Zone B	Zone C	Zone D	Zone E	Zone F	Zone G	Zone H	Zone I	Zone J	Zone K
Total tracked stops	5	10	5	3	7	8	13	8	4	7	8
Total non-tracked stops	25	21	20	6	16	18	24	12	25	17	18

Table 3. *City of Empire*: stops to watch videos

Videos	Zone A video	Zone B video	Zone I video	Zone K video
Viewed to the end	8	2	15	13
Viewed in part	11	6	8	8
Total stops	19	8	23	21

17 visitors were tracked throughout their visit. Of the tracked participants, 7 completed full tours, 7 stopped between zones B-H, 1 stopped at zones I/J, and 2 stopped at a single zone.

The exhibit space's layout had several blind spots. Although I could tally the number of non-tracked stops/video views, I was unable to simultaneously count the overall number of visitors present. So, I cannot determine whether *Curating Discomfort* or *City of Empire* attracted more visitors overall, but I can determine how consistent the spread of stops were.

#### 41.1. Analysis

Interview participant Curator B highlighted that *City of Empire*'s exhibit can be accessed "from either side" and there is no "exact start and end point in the display". This was consistent with visitor behaviour, so I observed participants starting at either zone A or zone K.

Zone A is a temporary part of the exhibit while zone K contains Red Interventions (videos/labels containing post-colonial narratives that *City of Empire* built upon). Although zones A and K were observed, a full 'tour' is considered engaging with at least one zone from B-H and from I-J because these make up the permanent exhibit (Figure 18.).

Content warnings (Figure 19.) are located adjacent to zones I and J but do not suggest a specific route. While some visitors move into the exhibit space, others passed by and only engaged with zones I-J. In the non-tracked tally, zone I attracted and held the most visitors along with zone A. Moreover, zone I's video attracted and held the most visitors, while zone B's had significantly fewer views.

Zones C and H are located opposite each other. Whereas C had third fewest stops in the tracked observations, it had the fifth highest number of stops in non-tracked observations. Conversely, H had the joint third highest number of stops in

the tracked observations but the second lowest number of stops in non-tracked observations.

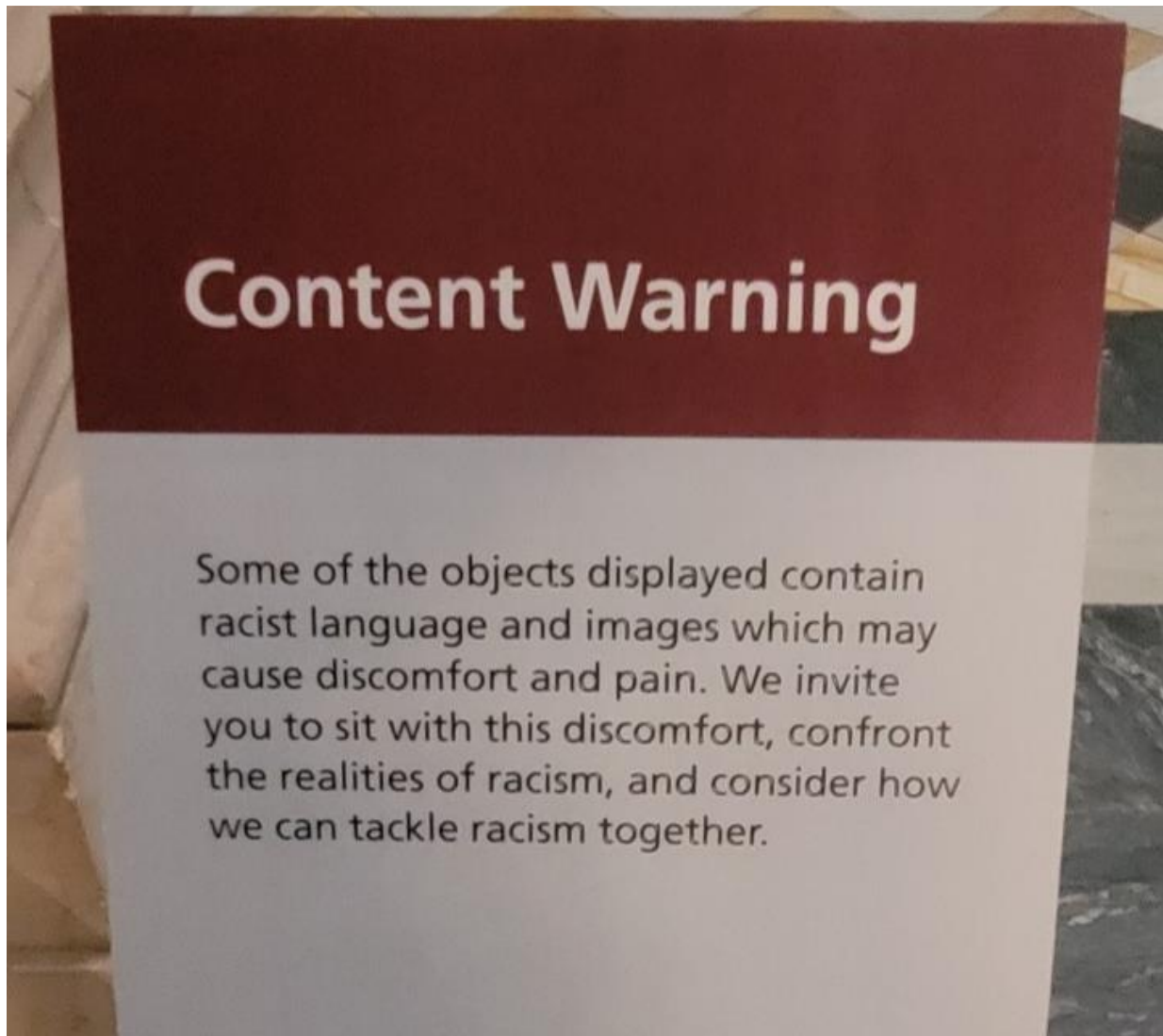


Figure 19. *City of Empire*: Content Warning (photograph by author)

#### 41.2. Discussion

The multiple routes available allowed visitors to choose their pathway and what they learned from.

The difference between tracked/non-tracked stopping results for zone I/J is because visitor entering zones B-H would have to walk back on themselves if they stopped at zones I/J, so most continued on to zone A/K. Therefore, zone I is more suited to attracting and stopping visitors as they pass by the exhibit while zones B-H invite visitors to spend time in the exhibit space.

Whereas visitors could simply watch zone A/I/K's videos before moving beyond the exhibit, zone B's video had less space/seating for visitors to stop and watch and could only be watched by visitors already in the main exhibit space.

A trend that explains the disparity in tracked and non-tracked results between zones C and H is that zone C featured in 2/7 of tracked full tours, while zone H featured in 5/7. This suggests that zone H's content attracted the attention of invested visitors more than that of zone C. By contrast, less invested visitors were likely more attracted to zone C due to the taxidermy animals because 3 visitors took photos of the specimens while no-one took photos of zone H.

Zone D (containing only a glossary defining terms used throughout the exhibit) functions as a secondary learning aid to be consulted if needed rather than as a primary object-centred learning material intended to stimulate engagement.

Whereas *Curating Discomfort's* central spine had a uniform layout that followed on from the longer introduction, *City of Empire* had no designated introduction and featured a more diverse range of approaches to delivering its learning content. Consequently, due to its extended word count and supplementary function, zone D can be considered an outlier while zones B/D in *Curating Discomfort* cannot. Taking this into account, the range between least and most stops in *City of Empire* is 9 (tracked) and 13 (non-tracked), while the range is 13 (tracked) and 19 (non-tracked) in *Curating Discomfort*. These ranges shows that *City of Empire* is better at attracting and holding visitors across all zones than *Curating Discomfort*. Whereas *Curating Discomfort* had several cold zones, *City of Empire's* hot zones were evenly distributed.

*City of Empire*, as a dedicated exhibit space, was a more cohesive visiting experience than the *Curating Discomfort* intervention because it yielded more full tours by tracked visitors.

## 42. Museum learning

### 42.1. Results

Participant Curator B explained that *City of Empire* was designed to use newly displayed objects and other elements to both “draw new visitors in” and “get people who are already there to engage, who might not have engaged with it otherwise”. Curator B clarified that audio-visual elements were intended to be “a focal point in the display” and something to “draw visitors in” to discover that the exhibit is “not just about the history of Glasgow, it’s about the present”. Curator B reasoned that these videos represented “a powerful way to draw people in who might not necessarily be as interested” because they were hosted by David Hayman, a recognisable “White/Scottish” celebrity, “talking about the importance of this subject”.

Curator B noted that topics of colonialism, empire and the Transatlantic Slave Trade are “not taught at school”, meaning that most visitors do not “have a good base level of understanding on” these subjects. Curator B explained that the curatorial team recognised a gap in visitors’ knowledge as a “common thread”, so it became “a really key part” in the development of *City of Empire*. Curator B relayed that the curatorial team were aware that for “a lot of folk it will be the first time they’re introduced to and taught about” these topics. Therefore, according to Curator B, *City of Empire* promotes a “balance” between learning from and critically engaging with the displays wherein some visitors “learn a lot from it and it will be quite ... expository for them” while others “probably go away and do further research”. Moreover, Curator B reasoned that “Glasgow’s connections to empire and slavery” was “too big a subject to [be] fully covered” in

one exhibit, so the curatorial team focused on presenting “the key lessons we can hopefully teach you about it”. The exhibit is broken up into clear themes such as “Colonial Miseducation”, “Symbols of Empire and Appropriation”, “The Cost of Abolition”, “Loot and Glasgow Museums”, etc.

Participant Visitor Experience employee C argued that *Curating Discomfort* “got people involved and engaged with the museum who probably wouldn’t have given us a second look before, maybe because they had preconceptions about us or the structures there that were inhibitive”.

*A Declaration of Discomfort* (in zone A) outlines how the Hunterian “puts forward discomfoting provocations and interventions to help us to understand that museums have perpetuated ideologies of white supremacy” (Figure 6.). The third introductory panel addresses the visitor to “encourage you to explore the rest of the Hunterian Museum, and other museums like it, with a critical eye and to consider how these [colonial] legacies might be apparent in the objects on display” (Figure 6.). However, participant Visitor Experience employee A argued that while some visitors apply this critical eye towards the rest of the museum, most visitors “won’t even make that connection with *Curating Discomfort*” because most do not read the labels enough to “figure out what’s going on”. Visitor Experience employee A further highlighted a “dissociation” in how the Hunterian is “critiquing the museum while also leaving completely intact all of these other objects” that are “unethical” and “should not be on display”.

Participant Visitor Experience employee C employee criticised *Curating Discomfort* for being “didactic” in how “it just tells you what to think” without offering “any solutions”. This participant further criticised the intervention for being “confrontational in a way that doesn’t stimulate dialogue” with visitors, which means that “people put the shutters up and don’t listen”. Only four

collection labels across four zones in *Curating Discomfort* feature questions (C, E, F, G).

Meanwhile, *City of Empire* features 7 questions on labels and 2 questions prompting visitors to start the Hayman videos across 4 zones (4 in zone B, 2 in G, 1 in I, 2 in J). Moreover, *City of Empire* issues a “Content Warning” at both entrances which “invite you to sit with this discomfort, confront the realities of racism, and consider how we can tackle racism together” (Figure 19.).

#### 42.2. Discussion

The museums’ focus on new visitors seeks to welcome all audiences because the inclusive curatorial teams addressed legacies of colonialism, removed the barrier of authorised heritage discourse and offered more interpretations that wider audiences can relate to.

By addressing visitors’ lack of knowledge on post-colonial topics through presenting key lessons, *City of Empire* compensates for the insufficient schooling that many Scots experienced, as found in the Smith et al’s 2021 survey. Herein, the overarching narratives ensure that all visitors leave with a fundamental understanding of the themes, with room to learn more independently. Moreover, the learning “balance” extends to the techniques used to present post-colonial narratives because the objects, labels, art pieces, and videos ensure that the learning is not one-dimensional and different types of learners can benefit during their visiting. The multiple entry points make the space easy to navigate and each theme digestible for visitors.

The use of a white man as face of a post-colonial exhibit could be criticised for potentially overshadowing the BAME voices involved in *City of Empire*. However, Hayman still subverts authorised heritage discourse by engaging with post-colonial subjects. Moreover, the videos proved to be effective in fulfilling

their intended purpose because zone I's attracted and held more visitors than B/K. This means that a significant number of passing-by visitors were exposed to the persistence of colonial legacies throughout Glasgow, which they could have otherwise missed. Further studies could determine whether the choice of Hayman played a role in attracting passing-by visitors.

In principle, *Curating Discomfort* intends to encourage visitors to construct knowledge through critical thinking. The focus on applying a "critical eye" means to fashion visitors into active learners who take this awareness of continuing injustices into future museum visits. This would extend the intervention beyond its own physical space.

In practice, however, the observations results show that visitors rarely moved from the introduction to other zones. Visitor Experience employee A's argument holds weight because not enough visitors take the opportunity to connect zone A to *Curating Discomfort's* other zones along the central spine. Most visitors have not been prompted to apply a "critical eye" by *A Declaration of Discomfort* (zone A) and are instead exposed only to didactic exposition that largely promotes the passive absorbing of knowledge (zones B-G). Moreover, *Curating Discomfort's* suggestion for visitors to apply a "critical eye" comes in the final paragraph of the third introductory panel, which can easily be overlooked. This again stresses the need for a clearer connection between the introductory space and central spine to stimulate active visitor learning. Further studies that survey visitor responses would better examine the extent to which visitors interrogate the Hunterian's displays in and beyond *Curating Discomfort*.

To avoid didacticism, *Curating Discomfort* could introduce the central spine with another panel that links to zone A by posing overarching questions designed to stimulate enquiry and discussion among visitors around all objects on display. Moreover, the Hunterian could reinforce the theme of questioning the rest of the museum throughout *Curating Discomfort* by repeatedly asking the visitor whether

they can identify any other nearby objects with colonial links and how they should be addressed.

Constructivist strategies can include “posing provocative questions to visitors, rather than answers” (Macdonald, 2006, p. 347). Although the number of questions asked by both cases are distributed across the same number of zones, *City of Empire* still reinforces learning through critical thinking more often than *Curating Discomfort*. Therefore, *City of Empire* achieves its intended “balance” between delivering didactic exposition and promoting active construction of knowledge through asking questions and inviting visitors to develop their own opinions. Moreover, the uses of “we” and “together” in the content warning connects the museum to other members of Scottish society in working towards a common social cause.

Conversely, *Curating Discomfort* situates itself at the centre of an anti-racist social movement in which it is the first to ask these discomfoting questions and expects visitors to do the same independently. But in cases where the intervention does not “stimulate dialogue”, whether by being confrontational or not conveying the need to think critically to visitors, visitors will not take an active role in this movement. So, both cases fit within Zeller’s educational/social category, although *City of Empire* is more responsive to the visitors’ role.

## 43. Formal learning

### 43.1. Results

Both *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* host school visits. Participant Visitor Experience employee B recalled a lack of teaching on topics of colonialism, empire or the Transatlantic Slave Trade in their time at school. Despite being “older”, participant Patterson had the same experience but noted that now his granddaughters’ primary school “came here specifically” to visit *Curating*

*Discomfort*. Patterson described schoolteacher's "interest" in post-colonial topics as a "positive" and a "big change" from his own experience.

Similarly, participant Curator B highlighted that the Kelvingrove run workshops "aimed at late-stage primary school up to secondary school and higher". Curator B outlined how these activities use *City of Empire* to focus on themes such as proper use of language, connecting colonial practice "to the everyday of people in Glasgow" or in contrast with other displays to interrogate "what sort of information is missing". Curator B recalled that there are "many teachers who want to teach" these topics in Glasgow and "want to know how to teach it well".

#### 43.2. Discussion

By providing learning resources for schools these two cases assist Scotland's curriculum reforms and allow students to learn more about colonialism, empire and enslavement than previous generations. Similarly, by informing schoolteachers how to deliver these topics, these cases demonstrate how non-formal learning complements formal learning, as previously suggested by Johnson & Majewska and Giblin et al. Indeed, *City of Empire's* range of activities also follow Seixas' historical consciousness principle to develop well-rounded students who have learned to recognise and address legacies of colonialism.

#### 44. Transferability of findings

These findings are heavily influenced by a Scottish context. Therefore, these findings are expected to be particularly relevant and transferable to other Scottish museums and, to a lesser extent, museums throughout Britain.

Transferability of findings to museums in other countries will be determined by the extent to which those countries and their museums were implicated in colonialism, empire and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the willingness of these countries and/or museums to engage in these post-colonial topics and the

awareness the general public has towards these historic practices. These variables will influence whether museums' post-colonial narratives need to be more overarching or more detailed.

In Scotland, smaller museums may be able to be more holistic than *Curating Discomfort* in how they intervene and reinterpret their objects and labels throughout the museum, rather than simply confining the intervention to a single space. Meanwhile, larger museums may benefit from the combined/embedded approach employed by the Kelvingrove to make these post-colonial narratives a drawing point for visitors that is reinforced throughout the rest of the museum.

These findings overlap with several of Museums Galleries Scotland's (2022b) recommendations as outlined in the Literature Review. Both museums have researched and reinterpreted parts of their collections to share post-colonial narratives. *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* exemplify the benefits of co-curation and pitfalls to be avoided in future projects. The Hunterian and Kelvingrove have sought to make anti-racism a key part of their work going forward and have supported schools to do the same through hosting school visits. Participants Curator B and Patterson both noted that the Kelvingrove and Hunterian are open to repatriation. Until the dedicated space to addressing Scotland's colonial history is established, the Hunterian and Kelvingrove offer permanent spaces addressing this subject matter. While both still have issues regarding the curatorial voice, they both offer encouraging first steps for permanent post-colonial change.

The conclusions chapter will summarise the strengths and weaknesses of these two cases and make suggestions for future museum projects and follow-up research projects.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### 45. Summary

The research questions answered in this study are:

1. How do these museums present post-colonial narratives?
2. Who has a say in how post-colonial narratives are told within these museums?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these post-colonial projects as tools for learning?

This research shows that *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* involved outside voices in the curation processes to present post-colonial narratives through two distinct approaches. Whereas *City of Empire* was held in a new exhibit space, *Curating Discomfort* intervened with existing exhibit space.

The results of this research have suggested that a post-colonial exhibition in a dedicated space allows for a wider range of learning approaches than an intervention, which in turn more effectively attracts and holds visitors' attention throughout a visit.

### 46. Impact of research

As stated in the introduction (Section 6.), the findings of this research can benefit Scottish museums by highlighting good practice and what pitfalls are to be avoided in producing educational material and decolonising a museum. With this commitment to institutional change, further post-colonial projects can learn from *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* to critically address colonial links within collection and museum practice itself. This can be achieved by diversifying and decolonising.

The findings show that Scottish museums can begin to dismantle authorised heritage discourse and empower other voices through increasing diversity throughout the curatorial team. This was a top-down process in the Hunterian and Glasgow Museums. First, the Hunterian and Glasgow Museums introduced new

curator roles that gave opportunity for BAME professionals to have equal authority over interpretation of collections and lead permanent flagship projects dedicated to addressing colonial links in these respective institutions. Second, these curators had the power to diversify further by recruiting temporary co-curatorial teams, with *Curating Discomfort* involving Community Curators and *City of Empire* employing OSCH changemakers.

Herein, it was found that it is preferable to include a diverse range of intersectional, intergenerational, multiracial perspectives in the curation process because this provides a broader spectrum of experiences and views that can inform the interpretations. As *City of Empire*'s co-curation team was made up of one ethnic background and age group, it meant that any interpretations of cultural heritage objects or histories of other peoples were not as informed as those concerning South Asia. Moreover, this repeated the practice of curators interpreting another people's cultural heritage with the authority that comes with being given a platform in a museum. Conversely, the Community Curators for *Curating Discomfort* were more ethnically diverse, so their interpretations were not one-dimensional. However, neither museum involved source communities in the interpretation of each object that related to cultural contexts not represented within either curatorial team.

As these curatorial teams were temporary and limited in terms of which voices were involved, it is important that further work be done to build on these projects to further involve BAME voices and to avoid this decolonial action becoming superficial or tokenistic. Therefore, other Scottish museums seeking to teach post-colonial narratives must first be prepared to commit to continual, systemic decolonial action.

This research shows that the layout of a space determines the degree to which a visitor is exposed to post-colonial narratives. The layout of the *City of Empire* exhibit allows passing by visitors and interested visitors alike to engage with

the Glasgow-centric post-colonial topic. While passing visitors were exposed to Glasgow colonial links in the Hayman videos, interested visitors could engage further by entering the main exhibit space to view the objects, art pieces, labels and videos. *Curating Discomfort*'s layout was found not to stimulate learning in the way the curators intended. Although the central spine succeeds in attracting visitors as intended, it does not necessarily connect to the overall learning experience set up by the introductory space nor does it prompt visitors to move linearly between each part of the intervention. Any museum that opts to follow the Hunterian's intervention model must ensure that all aspects of the project are interconnected to create a cohesive and reinforced learning experience that can be understood together or in part. So, Scottish museums that aim to revamp their space to include and promote post-colonial narratives must maintain a clear thematic through-line that can be easily registered by visitors.

Furthermore, this study shows that post-colonial narratives in museums can act as an important tool in supplementing formal education reforms and addressing the gap in knowledge many adult Scottish visitors have regarding Scotland's involvement in British colonialism, imperialism and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Interventions and exhibitions afford different approaches to engaging visitors. Both cases allow for a variety of themes to be explored, albeit *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* have been criticised for imposing unsuited post-colonial narratives on objects. Whereas *Curating Discomfort* promotes critical thinking, it often resorts to didacticism and rarely reminds visitors to critically assess other displays. By contrast, *City of Empire* aimed to strike a balance between passive exposition and actively involving the visitor through asking questions.

#### 47. Suggestions

Based on the findings of this research and subsequent critiques, I have several recommendations that can be applied to *Curating Discomfort* or *City of*

*Empire* and any future project looking to build on these examples in their other museums.

When interpreting an object belonging to a place or culture that is not already represented in the museum’s curatorial team is incorporated, then the museum should endeavour to reach out to that source community, whether found in the local diaspora or in the place of origin. This also provides an opportunity for curators to build relationships with these communities and genuinely share authority with others as agents of “social change” (Sections 15. Decolonisation).

When staging an intervention in a museum, the museum should ensure that each element of that intervention is clearly connected. In the case of *Curating Discomfort*, zone A needs to be better connected to zone B and the rest of the central spine to promote a clear visitor pathway. This can be done by repeating a series of central questions in additional labels. There are several blank spaces along the central spine that could host these questions, such as those seen in zones C, E and F (Figures 20-22.). Alternatively, panels that reintroduce the content from zone A’s *Declaration of Discomfort* could be placed at the start or midpoints of the central spine (zones B-G).



Figure 20. *Curating Discomfort*: Smillie intervention label (zone C)



Figure 21. *Curating Discomfort*: Rae intervention label (zone E)



Figure 22. *Curating Discomfort*: Brown intervention label (zone F)

Moreover, post-colonial displays should reinforce learning using more open-ended questions that prompt active construction of knowledge through critical thinking rather than teaching through didacticism.

All objects used to present post-colonial narratives must be relevant to this theme. This could give opportunity for new commissions to be included with input from the artist in its interpretation. Moreover, any contested objects considered for use should first be researched and the source community should be contacted in case of the need for conversations or action around repatriation. If a museum is unwilling to do this, then they do not have genuine interest in making reparations for their past colonial exploits, as noted by Hicks (2020) in cited in Section 14.

#### 48. Future Research

This dissertation has focused on learning and gaps in knowledge for the overall Scottish public and did not collect data on ethnicity of research participants. Therefore, my critique of *Curating Discomfort's* and *City of Empire's* teaching approaches is one that aims to improve the experience for general audiences and does not distinguish the needs of people from different background. Further studies could focus more on BAME and white responses to these two case studies. This could determine whether the teaching approaches elicit different responses for people belonging to different cultural demographics. This could better determine if specific approaches are necessary for different audiences.

The main focus for future studies would be to gather data on visitor responses to *Curating Discomfort* and *City of Empire* to determine the extent to which visitors meaningfully engage with the displays and learn about topics surrounding colonialism, empire and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Both museums have carried out independent reviews of visitor feedback, which were referenced several times in interviews. These responses varied between positive or negative feedback; participants Curator B, Patterson, Visitor Experience employee B and C also gave accounts of visitors' maintaining their predetermined responses to post-colonial interpretations or changing their opinion after visiting. Due to the scope and limitations of this study, I could not assess visitor responses or gauge the extent of learning taking place. Future research could determine the extent to

which the museum-led feedback initiatives and visitor experience staffs' accounts correspond with results gathered by a researcher that does not represent the museum. Moreover, future research could examine the extent to which museums have become sites of "healing" (Section 15.).

Another topic for further research would be whether these two projects led to significant, systemic and long-term decolonial activity in the Hunterian and Kelvingrove. Participants Curator B, Patterson, Visitor Experience employee A, B and C outlined ways in which their respective museums have progressed or stagnated in their decolonising practice. Future studies could explore whether co-curation has led to temporary or permanent employment or further collaborations between these museums and the BAME diaspora in Glasgow.

#### 49. Final Points

Ultimately, while *Curating Discomfort* and *Glasgow - City of Empire* represent early, positive examples of work towards decolonising and diversifying installation curation and presenting post-colonial narratives in Scottish museums, future post-colonial projects can learn from their strengths and improve upon their weaknesses.

The main strength of *Curating Discomfort* is how it permanently added diverse voices into the main hall to disrupt and highlight bias in existing interpretations, which attracted browsing visitors' attention. However, the main weaknesses are the disconnect between each zone and how it frames museum pedagogy. It shows that future projects can apply interventions around existing displays but must ensure that these new post-colonial displays link to the overarching social and educational purposes of the project.

*City of Empire's* main strengths are its variety of educational approaches and the layout of the exhibit, which effectively attracts and holds visitors' attention across all zones and exposes them to different forms of learning. However, the main weaknesses of *City of Empire* are the lack of diversity within

the co-curation team and subsequent failure to reach out and include other voices to fill this gap. Future exhibitions can use this example to widen the scope of their community engagement to better represent all voices and strengthen their interpretations.

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## Appendix 1: Contents of Curating Discomfort

### Zone A

- Declaration of Discomfort panel
- Curating Discomfort panel
- Object perspectives (objects, labels)
- Curating Discomfort in the Hunterian's Collection panel
- Mind map

Untitled video  
Community Curators panel

#### Zone B

The Bishops intervention label  
Community Curator objects (Jamaican Giant Galliwasp, Bottle, Kikuyu Armlet, labels)  
Lewis Clapperton intervention label

#### Zone C

Frederick Eck intervention label  
Paintings label  
Ina J Smillie intervention label

#### Zone D

Community Curator object (Battle Axe, label)  
Emile Louis Bruno Clement intervention label

#### Zone E

Emily Dix intervention label  
Community Curator objects (Tasmanian Devil, spear, labels)  
George Rae intervention label

#### Zone F

Alfred Nicholson Leeds intervention label  
Paintings label  
Thomas Brown of Lanfine intervention label

#### Zone G

Community Curator objects (Hadley's Quadrant, Opium pipe and box, Gold-dust box, labels)  
James 'Paraffin' Young intervention label

## Appendix 2: Contents of Glasgow - City of Empire

#### Zone A

Anam Ki Almari (The Trophy Cupboard) (video, panel)  
Ghar Ke Khazaneh (Home Treasures) (display, label)

## Zone B

Were you ever asked to question Glasgow's role in Empire and Slavery? (video)  
Colonial Miseducation (objects, labels)

## Zone C

Colonial Exploitation of Nature (objects, panel)

## Zone D

Glossary panels

## Zone E

Products of Empire (objects, labels)  
Rani of Jhansi (object, label)

## Zone F

Symbols of Empire and Appropriation (object, label)  
Cotton Samples (objects, labels)

## Zone G

Newspaper clippings  
Posters and signs (with labels)  
We're Here Because You Were There panel

## Zone H

Cost of Abolition panel (with objects, label)

## Zone I

Glasgow - City of Empire panel  
Untitled video  
Unbroken (objects, labels)

## Zone J

Profiting From Human Suffering (objects, labels)  
Launch of the Christian painting (with label)  
Loot and Glasgow Museums panel

## Zone K

Colonial foundations (Red Interventions label)  
A Museum Rooted in Empire (Red Interventions label)  
State Visit of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria to the Glasgow International  
Exhibition painting (with video)

## Appendix 3: Interview questions

The researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with curators. These set questions may prompt further questions based on the interviewee's responses.

### General Questions

What is your role?

What does that role entail?

How long have you done that for?

What do you find most rewarding or challenging about your role?

Do you think that schools give enough attention to themes of colonialism, slavery and racism?

Has this schooling had any influence on museum approaches to these topics?

If so, in what ways?

How does the exhibit/display you are involved with differ from past or traditional exhibitions in how it represents objects?

What did you want to include or avoid to set the exhibit/display you are involved with apart from traditional museum exhibits?

How have you sought to engage visitors?

Has the exhibit/display you are involved with worked as the curators intended?

Is the exhibit/display you are involved with intended for a particular audience?

Who has been primary audience?

What impact has the exhibit/display you are involved with had on visitors?

Language and terminology can evolve over time. Will the exhibit/display you are involved with adapt to changing circumstances?

What was the process of choosing objects for the exhibit?

Were they preselected by the museum curators before the co-curators joined the project or did co-curators themselves have a role in picking out relevant objects?

Were there any themes or objects that could not be included? If so, why?

How were community curators recruited? Why were these people chosen?

As individual people can have different views on what is problematic or acceptable, did you at any point need to respond to conflicting perspectives within the curatorial process?

How does the exhibit/display you are involved with counter "Thinking about white as the norm"?

Do museums offer an opportunity for a higher level of diversity than other professional sectors?

How can museums represent voices or cultures that themselves are not represented within museum staff? Who then has authority to oversee this?  
How can museums bring in these voices?  
Was the co-curating process a success?  
What lessons did you learn?  
What key agreements or compromises were made?  
Would you do anything differently for future projects?  
How was the location for the exhibit/display chosen? How does the location of the exhibit bring attention to the key themes?  
What kind of learning does the exhibit/display promote? How does it aim to achieve this?  
What has been the short-term or long-term impact of the exhibit/display you are involved with?  
What would you like the legacy of the exhibit/display you are involved with to be?  
Has/will the exhibit/display you are involved with have a lasting impact on the museum's curatorial practice?

#### Questions specific to *Curating Discomfort*

Your Declaration of Discomfort states that museums are political while others claim museums should offer an impartial and balanced view. How has *Curating Discomfort* responded to this opposing ideology?  
Why did you choose to contrast new labels with the old labels?  
Since it opened, have you become aware of any gaps that could still be addressed in *Curating Discomfort*?  
The curatorial team for *Curating Discomfort* was made up of academics. Do you think there are any other voices that can be included in projects like this?  
The Jamaican Giant Galliwasp has been taken from display to be studied and eventually returned to Jamaica. How did this repatriation come about?  
What is the plan for the display area once the object is returned?  
Is it considered a success for the collection being reduced in this way?  
The idea of rotating the display to include other hidden histories and intersections (workshop graphic record - session 4) was discussed. Is there a plan to rotate other displays or will they remain as they are?

#### Questions specific to *Glasgow - City of Empire*

How did your involvement in *Curating Discomfort* inform your approach in this project?  
What did you learn from that project?  
How did you apply these lessons to this new exhibit?

What would you consider to be the key differences between the two exhibits?

Museums can either be perceived as political or impartial. Where does *Glasgow - City of Empire* fit between these two perceptions?

This exhibit includes the voices of people from different ethnic backgrounds. What was the importance in including ethnic minority and ethnic majority voices?

Should a repatriation claim be made, how will *Glasgow - City of Empire* respond?

How would a repatriation event impact the exhibit?

Is it considered a success for the collection being reduced in this way?

## Appendix 4: Curator A transcript extracts

Interview with Curator A

June 14, 2024, 10:15AM

55m 33s

At the request of the participant, only extracts from the transcript have been shared. The condition was that only extracts pertaining to quotes that featured in the body of the dissertation be included here. This has been done to ensure that the participant cannot be identified.

To further ensure anonymity, anything that can still be used to identify the participant or anyone else referred to at any point in the interview has been redacted. Where text has been removed for anonymisation, I have inserted [...] in its place.

Ethan Terry: started transcription.

[...]

14:55

So, this is a, so it's a major flaw that the voices again is people, it's other people telling African people their people's story without, you know, and not giving the African voice any airplay, any chance to speak, so.

[...]

17:20

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[...] These days, you really need to consult with the artist or the representative of the artist because they're very particular, they're very particular stories, their own stories. So, with their paintings are their own stories. And so there, there was a post-colonial narrative imposed upon a particular painting that was not the story of the artist [...].

18:55

Ethan Terry: Yeah, well, that answers a question I was going to ask about how museums can represent voices that aren't within the staff.

19:15

Curator A: We have the Internet, we have e-mail, we've got telephones.

19:18

Ethan Terry: Exactly.

19:20

Curator A: It's very easy.

[...]

23:30

[...] I mean really, I mean that actually communicating is not a problem, you know and, but if you were doing something like *City of Empire*, you have the community, you have a diaspora right there. That's not difficult, they're in Glasgow.

25:23

Ethan Terry: Well exactly.

25:28

Curator A: And as I say someone offered. So, it's very siloed and that's a problem; siloed and kind of structured.

[...]

45:50

Curator A: *City of Empire* is a very traditional way to interpret. And it's very much what we want to say is imposed on the object as opposed to what the object could, and the artist could, bring to the interpretation, you know. Sort of like they're social history objects and not the work of the artist, the struggle the artist had to

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make the way, why he chose to make, what she meant to him, you know what that figure meant to him, you know, the historic figure. And, you know, just sifting through all that, that would have been really, you know, would have certainly added a much more profound depth and much more authentic voice to the message actually, because the message of decolonization, it's very traditional.

[...]

Transcription end 55:33

## Appendix 5: Curator B transcript

June 17, 2024, 10:03AM

1h 14m 2s

To ensure anonymity, anything that can be used to identify the participant or anyone else referred to at any point in the interview has been redacted. Where text has been removed for anonymisation, I have inserted [...] in its place.

Ethan Terry: started transcription

0:08

Ethan Terry: OK, so I think that's started recording. Now. Let's just check. Yep, perfect. So, just real quick, just real quick, I don't know. Would you like a quick recap of what my topic is or you?

0:19

Curator B: Yeah, that that would be great. Thank you.

0:23

Ethan Terry: So yeah, the my dissertation. It's called Scottish Museum's approaches to post-colonial narratives.

0:29

Curator B: OK.

0:30

Ethan Terry: And I'm using *Glasgow - City of Empire* as well as *Curating Discomfort* as my 2 case studies. And I will also be bringing in some of the interventions found in the Kelvingrove as well as the ghost dance shirt display because that's one of the sort of original pieces of post-colonial work in the Kelvingrove.

1:05

Ethan Terry: So yeah. Just to start off, could you just explain what your role is in Glasgow museums, what that entails?

1:16

[...]

2:37

Ethan Terry: Mm hmm. OK. And what are some of the things that you find most rewarding or challenging about this role?

2:52

[...]

4:40

Ethan Terry: So, getting into the specifics now, how does *Glasgow - City of Empire*, would you say, differs from sort of past or traditional exhibitions in how it represents objects?

4:52

Curator B: Absolutely. So, I guess one of the main things is probably in terms of how we've tried to explore, like, slavery and empire, I think a lot of the time the sort of traditional way we kind of approached talking about and discussing objects it can be quite focused on, you know, like either the - so for example, in the piece in an artwork, it can be focused on like the collector of the artwork or it can be focused on the actual artists themselves and like their style of painting and things like that, I guess with the artworks on display and *City of Empire*, particularly like the Launch of the Christian, we really wanted to talk about the event that's being painted and the significance that event had for sort of Glasgow's and the West of Scotland's connections to slavery. So, I guess there are lots of sort of like different approaches like that where we're trying to focus a bit more on the sort of people and events that the objects connect to rather than just solely talking about the objects. [I] completely understand it and understand why the approach is quite often in museum spaces to talk about objects and talk about these, you know, all sorts of

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amazing objects that lots of museums have in their collection and things like that but I think it particularly emerged when we start trying to think about how to talk about slavery and empire that a lot of the time, the way to do it through the objects that we have in the Glasgow Museum's collection is to talk about the people the objects connect to. And quite often that can connect to, you know, people who are enslaved, people who were colonised, people who did the sort of enslaving and colonising or it can relate to also people who resisted against those things as well. So, I think really try to think about how objects related to people or wider stories of like place and historic events or contemporary events in a history or a city and things like that was, I think, really how we tried to do that with the objects that we had.

6:59

Ethan Terry: OK, so. Well, with all that in mind, how do you seek to engage your visitors then?

7:14

Curator B: Yeah. So, I think one of the main ways we sort of want to engage our visitors, so even though we're aware that the space is quite open, so you can come to it from like either side. There's our balcony, and there's not necessarily an exact sort of start and end point in the display. One of the things that we looked to do though was to try and figure out, because we're aware that like you know because there's not been a lot of work done in this space in museums, in particular in Glasgow Museums, we're aware that there are, you know, people who are interested in it would come to view the display because it's like something new and it's something on a subject that's under-addressed. So, but so we knew people who are sort of interested in subjects already will come to see it, but I guess we're thinking about visitors who wouldn't necessarily always be drawn to a display on Empire. One of the things we did was the sort of the David Hayman video that's like The Walking tour of the city almost that sits in the display. We really wanted out of all the sort of audio visual stuff that we had in it, we really wanted that one to be one that was in quite a focal point in the display, but also at a point where if people were walking by they might see the sort of images on the screen, say for that place on the loop, they might see someone else watching the video, they might see someone they recognise, like David Hayman, and might think, oh, what's this? and then they sort of get drawn into the, you know, actually this is all about Glasgow and it's not just about the history of Glasgow, it's about the present. And we really saw that as a way to try and draw visitors in who are in the building already. And I think particularly because as great as it's actually, I mean there's all

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sorts of, you know, visit evaluation, there's all sorts of stuff that's come up in terms of drawing in like new visitors to Kelvingrove, which is really nice. But I think we're aware we're very much thinking of not only how do we draw new visitors in, but also how actually Kelvingrove such a busy space, how do we get people who are already there to engage, who might not have engaged with it otherwise, to engage with it. I think using that David Hayman video was one way but also trying to use like sort of objects from Glasgow Museum's collection that haven't been displayed before, but are really amazing objects to look at. So, like the giant door, the Rani of Jhansi sculpture, and whatsoever sort of objects on display in the exhibition sort of tick, that box as well. So, to try and get that balance like having something that would draw people in but also having things there that were good to look at as well, actually.

10:08

Ethan Terry: Well, that, yeah, that brings to mind a couple of questions I was going to ask actually. So, I think they kind of almost linked together because, the times I've visited, that David Hayman video felt like a very deliberate choice.

10:24

Curator B: Yeah.

10:26

Ethan Terry: So maybe explain a little bit of the thinking of what, well how did he come involved. Was he approached? Why was he chosen? And then also is there a specific target audience for this and does that come into play at all with the way he was chosen?

10:45

Curator B: Yeah, absolutely. So, I guess I could probably, I'll maybe start by just saying the target audience and I can like go back to what we chosen David Hayman.

So, the target audience, so we had I guess 2 main target audiences. So, we had sort of adults, but particularly adults who are like White Scottish or White British and that was with this acknowledgement that you know, it's like challenge racism in the present day and we really, you know, really needs a key group of people we need to budget in society is people who are White Scottish and White British because ultimately, as the sort of majority group in our society, if racism is going to be eradicated and ended, they're the group who we really need to engage with the subject. And also on the [other] foot and then our other priority target audience was sort of like black and minority ethnic people and that was because we wanted

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to sort of recognise that in a lot of museum spaces, particularly our own museum spaces, Glasgow museums, that the sort of voices and perspectives and narratives that are like empowering to minority ethnic people, particularly in terms of thinking like things like resistance, civil rights movements in the UK and Scotland, and things like that, had been like quite absent in our spaces as well and this seemed like a subject where a subject and a focus for a display where those things really go hand in hand with it. So, I think they were our main 2. And we're also thinking within that, like sort of like, young people and particularly thinking around schools groups because as it's a permanent display, any display that goes in to a Glasgow Museum's sort of museum has to have a school's workshop developed alongside it. So, school, that sort of thinking of what would work for a school's group was also, and young people, was also quite high in our thinking as well in terms of audiences. So, it was really quite broad.

So, in terms of the David Heyman video, so we always, one of the things we always wanted to do was to do a sort of like video of Glasgow that operates on this like you're being taken or walking tour of Glasgow and seeing it's, you know, connections to slavery in its built environment. This was partly as a sort of nod to the fact that those sort of walking tours have been being done by, like the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, like 20 odd years. So, we wanted to sort of nod to that, have something in that nodded to that and sort of, even though it doesn't explicitly highlight and make that connection to them in the video, we wanted something to kind of acknowledge where this knowledge has come from sort of thing. And I guess the way the David Hayman impact came about was, so we're originally sort of thinking how we would narrate this and how we would film it and things like that, and one of the project team suggested David Hayman. And, so I think it's because he's done previous work with Glasgow museums before, but also because he was involved in narrating some previous documentaries a few years ago on BBC for about slavery in Scotland, and so he knew it as a subject that is like engaged with and interested in. And I think I think part of why David Hayman was to do with that idea of our audiences and to do with how we would draw our visitor in who wasn't interested in the subject while still having plenty there for a visit to his interest in the subject and wants to learn more. I think part of it was having someone like David Hayman, who's like a familiar voice, someone people recognise, but also having that sort of idea of having someone who's like White Scottish/White British talking about like the importance of this subject we felt would be sort of a powerful way to draw people in who might not necessarily be as interested. And yeah, and he was really generous with his time, really happy to be involved. And yeah, I think it's sort of solely it came about sort of quite luckily in the sense that he'd done previous work for Glasgow museums before, so someone had his contact

and could get in touch with him, things like that. But yeah, so it came about that way.

15:23

Ethan Terry: Amazing. Well, I mean so, you talked about the target audiences and you said that you, I assume you deal with the feedback as well.

15:35

Curator B: Yeah.

15:36

Ethan Terry: Yeah. So, has the exhibit have the desired effect you wanted on the, like especially the, well either target audiences: the White Scottish audience or the ethnic minority audience?

15:56

Curator B: Yeah. I mean, I think so, like so we had some visitor evaluation done and that sort of showed us that the display. So, usually about 10% of Kelvingrove's visitors are from a minority ethnic background. The visitor evaluation study we did showed that you know like about one in four people who are coming to the displays like 25% of the people coming to the display are from a minority ethnic background. So, it's sort of like much better than the usual Kelvingrove stats in terms of like diversity of audience and things like that. And in that visitor evaluation, we had lots of really positive feedback from all sorts, you know, from all the different audiences that have visited. You know, we had sort of like White Scottish people who'd lived all their life in Glasgow talking about how this is really educated me on things in my own city that I didn't know about but are really important to know about, had minority ethnic people talking about, talking in a similar way to be honest, but also, you know highlighting some of the fact that having those stories are like resistance and civil rights movements and things like that highlighted they found quite empowering, and they found it wasn't a sort of narrative around slavery or empire that sort of like marginalised and didn't engage with the voices of those who were enslaved and colonised. So, I think there was generally really strong feedback on that and people appreciated seeing that. And also we had lots of like really good feedback on, you know like over I think it's like over 90% maybe over 95% of the visitors who we sort of spoke to as part of the evaluation, you know, said that they learned something from the display. They learned something that, but also said that they learned something from the display that they would, you know, take into or make a big part of their everyday life or work, which I thought

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was really particularly for something that trying to not only sort of factual about the past but also anti-racist, I thought it was really valuable. So, we had lots of really great feedback from all sort of different audiences and I think was quite interesting as well is like as much as, you know, it's sort of solidified as well that as much as sometimes when you're doing this audience preparation for a display, you can look at it and you can look at different groups of people and maybe you can fall into this trap of thinking about how they might think differently, might respond to things differently, and even though I get that that can happen, you actually realise that realistically the, you know, like there's not that obviously the lived experience of racism has a really powerful impact but actually in terms of how then people receive the display and perceive the display, there's not necessarily a huge difference between, you know a White Scottish person or a minority ethnic person who are the same age and things like that.

18:50

Ethan Terry: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I'm just trying to thinking how to sort of phrase this next question that's sort of coming to mind. Like obviously dealing with you know, the exhibition dealing with topics of racism, I would assume not all the feedback is stuff that you appreciate.

19:23

Curator B: Yeah.

19:24

Ethan Terry: To put it lightly.

19:26

Curator B: Yeah.

19:27

Ethan Terry: Is that something that you then try and focus on to try even more, does that motivate you even more to try and eradicate this and address it? Or do you kind of push that bit aside and just focus on the sort of positive impact that you're already having?

20:12

Curator B:

Yeah, I mean I think it's good to know like we haven't, like obviously you do get some people that are less than thrilled with the display or whatever but I guess

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that'll always happen possibly. But you do read it and you do sort of, you don't necessarily take it in, but you do read it because it's important to know kind of what you're up against and kind of know what the arguments against doing this work are, I suppose. But mainly, yeah, try to focus on the positive, I think particularly because quite often you can get in terms of sort of criticism around this work happening quite often, the people who criticise it are a sort of minority, small minority, of people, but they can be very vocal. So, there's a need sometimes to have that perspective of 'Actually, no, it is having a really positive impact', It's just that quite often the people who, you know, the majority of people you see and it has a positive impact on them aren't necessarily going to write in and tell you that. And yeah, and I think sometimes, yeah, I think it is, as I say, it's good to be aware of what comes in, I suppose to see like the arguments against it. And I guess one example that's come to mind for myself is there's been a couple of comments that have come in that have sort of spoken about and referred to, you know, enslavement and chattel slavery as being like historic human trafficking and I guess being aware of that sort of argument, I think is quite important because I guess it's this like historic human trafficking really downplays and understates what child slavery was and doesn't engage, you know, with the horror of it and the, you know, lifelong suffering and enslavement and things like that. So, I think actually being aware that that there's some of the arguments that are put forward so you know how you can counter them and critique them and be quite clear 'No, this is why this isn't Language you use' and things like that, it's helpful to be aware of.

21:54

Ethan Terry: Yeah. No, that make that one makes a lot of sense. Right, I'm just trying to find my place again. So, I think we may have already possibly covered this, but what kind of learning does the exhibit sort of promote? Is it, is it sort of expository, or is it trying to engage and provoke the visitor? Or is it a sort of mixture of both?

22:35

Curator B: I'm just thinking. I'd say it is a mixture of both because I think particularly, I guess, particularly with like the fact that because it was a permanent display [it] has to be in line with like Kelvingrove sort of style guide and standards. So, Glasgow Museums' sort of style guide is I think it's based on the Scottish reading age being sort of between 11 and 12 and we can only go up to 15 in terms of the reading age of our labels and graphics and things like that. And that means, and our graphics and labels lengths are quite short compared to other museums: I think our graphic lengths, you know, 80 to 100 words and label lengths 30 words ish but I

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think you can get a bit of leeway up to having about 40 ish, because I'm sure you'll see from the display there are some labels where it definitely is more than 30 words on. But I think because of that it's trying to find that balance because I think if you I think there's a degree of some people will come to that display take a lot from it, learn a lot from it and it will be quite, you know, expository for them and things like that. But then I guess there are other people who come to the display and it might be good for them as like an introduction to Glasgow and Empire, but they'll probably go away and do further research and they'll be like, oh, I saw this name in the display and think 'Who's that?' So, it's trying to get that balance and I think particularly because it's around the subject that we're not taught at school, not really taught, you know, people don't get educated or there's mandatory, so it's not something that we have a good base level of understanding on sadly and I think that means that I think that means that in approaching the display, you know sort of way people learn from it is a real mix and it's try to find that balance of you know someone who knows a bit about it and has a good face understanding might come to it and they might actually plenty of stuff that they already know but they might also be introduced like sort of new names, new objects and stuff that they didn't know, but also it might be stuff that introduces like things for them to go away and learn further about. Whereas I think for some people they'll come to it and it'll give them, it will be everything in it will be something that they didn't know a lot about and they'll actually take a lot from it and they might not necessarily - it'd be great if they do go away and do this - but they might not be as likely to go away and do that sort of like further reading because they might have already taken a lot from it.

25:23

Ethan Terry: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. There's a couple times you've referenced schools and I know that's part of the exhibit is that section about, well one of the videos, about the education and a few of the objects relating to that. So, you know, in my research I found quite recently within the last couple years there has been quite a lot of reforms in schools to include more black history and attention to anti racist initiatives.

26:00

Curator B: Yeah.

26:07

Ethan Terry: But do you think that in years prior to that that schools have given enough attention to, you know, these sort of themes of colonialism and slavery and racism.

26:19

Curator B: Yeah, I guess no, not really. I guess I can probably only speak for my own perspective in a lot of ways [...] I know it's quite a common thing when you speak to other people who do this work, not just in museums, but other sectors; academics, things like that, I think it's quite, journalists and stuff as well and activists too, it's like quite a common thread that this is not a history that a lot of people were taught at school and it's quite often a history that's been like self-taught through reading or through having parents or a community around you that are like, no, you should be, you know, you should be reading this or you should be educating yourself on that. And it's a lot of, sort of self taught through really good work and research done by the folk, but it's very much feels like it's was missing in my own education. And to be honest. I think it's yeah. Even though I know I think it does seem to be something that is getting much better. Like I find it amazing now that you have, there seems to be so many teachers who want to teach it, particularly in Glasgow, and they seem to want to engage with it and want to know how to teach it well. And I had, like, I think that's a big step because that's not something that I recognise in my own sort of background and growing up and stuff [...] so it's good to see that progress already.

28:37

Ethan Terry: Yeah, I think I'm, you know, sort of in the same boat and anecdotally, when I was in school, we didn't really have a touch on the, especially the British aspect. We did do an entire, I remember doing an entire module on the Transatlantic Slave Trade but it was all from, all focused on America and we never actually touched on the British side of it.

29:11

Curator B: Yeah.

[...]

29:30

Ethan Terry: Yes. Yeah. So it's recent history. Yeah. Yeah. And just in my sort of daily life, whenever I talk to people about this stuff, they don't, aren't aware of it, and if they are aware of it, they don't, they are only vaguely aware of it in a lot of ways because of that. But yeah, in light of that has the has that sort of school

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education had an impact on how you wanted to frame some of these things in the exhibit.

30:12

Curator B: Yeah, absolutely. I think that was a really key part. I think it was trying to think, like I know my own perspective a lot of it was think thinking from that place of this will be the first time someone's introduced to it or thought about it. I know that's not the case for everyone just thinking, you know of like what we get taught in school, a lot of folk it will be the first time they're introduced to and taught about it. And it was thinking within that if we're thinking about Glasgow's connections to empire and slavery, obviously a huge subject and probably too big a subject to fully covered in a space of that size, even though it's a great space. It was sort of trying to think, well, what are the really key things that people need to take away? What are some of the key places that we need to highlight? Even if we're not necessarily highlighting every place, there's a big connection. What are some of the key legacies and things like that? So, I think that was a really, yeah, that was really at the forefront like what things are really keeping people [...] So I guess that's why some of the stuff is like, you know, Glasgow made lots of money from slavery and that money was invested throughout the city. So, you can still see the legacy and benefit from that today or like thinking of empire and thinking and trying to introduce that idea of Glasgow had an absolutely massive connection and impact on Colonial India and things like that. And also you know I guess the stuff about contemporary racism and thinking well Glasgow was a city connected to the racism of the past and that's why we still have racing the present. So, try to like really draw out some things like that that you want people to take away almost like it's like, you know if you want, if you're not taught about it at school, what are the key lessons we can hopefully teach you about it.

31:59

Ethan Terry: I mean, that's it. I mean, one of the one of the most mind-blowing things I learnt from the exhibit was the fact that reparations were still being paid to the families of people involved in the in the transatlantic slave trade and, don't take this wrong way, I even had to go and like fact check that because I was so mind blown by that.

32:27

Curator B: No, I think that's completely fair and you're not the only person who said that it is. It is absolutely staggering.

32:28

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Ethan Terry: So yeah. Yeah. Right, so yeah, just to move on. So, something I've come across in my research is this idea that museums, if they're gonna touch this topic, they need to be balanced and show both sides. Whereas other museums, for example, like the Hunterian with the *Curating Discomfort*, have come outright and said no, we are making this is a political statement. Where does, where do you think *Glasgow - City of Empire* falls between that?

33:13

Curator B: I mean probably I think it the intention it's it sets more towards the Hunterian side to be honest. I guess for us it's about it was very much about saying that like you know when we've spoken about slavery and empire we have done it from a perspective that hasn't acknowledged people who are enslaved or colonised and hasn't actually really acknowledged how horrific slavery and empire were. So I guess we are quite naturally by doing those things we are sitting on one side of it but I suppose for us as well it was about a lot of the approach I know we have like a wider anti racist statement that outlines a lot of this stuff as well, but I think one of the things was also acknowledging that we're an institution that has historically and even in the present day with some of the objects in our collections and the history of several of our buildings like we're an institution that's benefited from empire and being quite clear that benefiting from empire is benefiting from someone else and another nation, another group of peoples suffering and colonisation, so I guess we have. By doing that I think we have taken quite a clear stance where we sit politically on it and I guess a lot of that is where it's quite interesting on the discussions around balance and stuff like that because it's like well, we just put things in there that happens you know, put things in there that are facts and then it's quite interesting to see how that is then you know, interpreted as leaning one way or another. And I mean, even though it probably does to be fair, I think it's quite, yeah, I find it quite interesting how all of this stuff sits and gets raised and it's yeah.

34:55

Ethan Terry: Yeah, absolutely. So where was I? One thing I wanted to ask was because language and terminology can sort of evolve and change over time, is that something that could, you mentioned it's a permanent exhibition, but does what, will the exhibition change and will it adapt at all?

35:21

Curator B: Yeah, hopefully, yeah, I think it will. I think that's the aim. I think it's that's the thing. I know we all like. I think when we say exhibitions permanent, I

think it's partly for the ease of language because really they're all semi permanent so they can always be changes. It doesn't mean everything there's set and it's going to stay like that forever. But I think once if we said semi permanent which I explained the technicalities of what that means it would be you know it's not that interesting I guess. So, I guess there is, yeah, I think we would definitely look to adapt and change the display as we go along. I mean some of that will happen quite naturally because of conservation reasons on some of the objects and things like that. There'll be a limit on, I think particularly like the paper materials and stuff like that, how long they can be displayed for. And that'll probably be whenever that is that they change, I don't actually know off the top of my head, that'll probably be quite a natural point to then be like, oh, is there anything that we want to add or whether there is something that we want to change and add in. So yeah, I think it's definitely something that we see as something will change and adopt as time goes on.

36:28

Ethan Terry: And then like perhaps on, like, flipside, if you bring in the sort of repatriation aspect is there, has there been any conversations about that in, you know, the sort of process of creating this exhibit? Is that something that you're sort of proactively looking at or is that something that you'll deal with as it comes along?

37:08

Curator B: Yeah, absolutely. So I guess in terms of the objects on display in the exhibition, I think, well, I guess it's as I say this, I'm aware that the Hunterian repatriated their Jamaican lizards really recently. So, maybe that could actually end up applying to ours. But I think as far as we're aware, we tried as much as possible to include objects where we knew there wouldn't be, there wouldn't be a sort of issue of them being looted or anything like that. And that was done that was done with the intention of, I guess sort of maybe sits around some of these ideas around like political voice. But we felt if we were having a narrative in the display that's trying to be more empowering to those who are enslaved and colonised and their descendants, then we thought actually including looted objects isn't doesn't sit right within that and isn't empowering. And so tried as much as possible not to include objects that could be repatriated, but I guess it's some of the Natural History stuff that might sit a bit different now after the Hunterian's repatriation of Jamaican lizards. But yeah, as much as possible, try to make sure that that wasn't the case, but I guess with how we do repatriation, even though I don't think this is necessarily something that will Glasgow Museums will always do and always follow,

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I suppose these processes can change, but I don't know if they will. In terms of how we do repatriation, a lot of it is dependent on a not necessarily just a museum, but for example, a lot of it is dependent on a museum or a government getting in touch with us and saying 'you have This object that was looted' and they have to be the ones who start the process, even if it's something we then would support with and take up. And I think that means that our approach to repatriation, even though we've done lots of, you know, we've done several really goods cases of repatriation in Glasgow Museum sort of history, our approach to repatriation isn't a very proactive one, and hopefully that, in my personal opinion, would be good if that is something that changes over time. But at the moment it means that our repatriation approach is really limited on someone getting in touch with us.

39:34

Ethan Terry: Makes sense. Makes sense. Yeah. So I'm ask one more question about the exhibit and then I'm gonna try and sort of shift focus to the more curatorial side,.

39:46

Curator B: Yeah, absolutely.

39:49

Ethan Terry: What is, what legacy would you like for the *City of Empire* exhibit to have?

40:01

Curator B: I guess, I suppose if a few things, I suppose one of the things is I'd like it'd be good if it's very much, sort of, I don't actually want to say start because I know this work has happened in our spaces, and particularly with the red interventions and things like that, but it'd be good if there's a legacy if we'd looked back at like, you know, 10-20 years time as Glasgow museums and that was the start of us doing far more of this work in terms of not only displays but schools, workshops and working more generally in anti racist way and having you know having displays and exhibitions all across our different buildings and venues around empire and picking out different parts of empire and how they relate to Glasgow and things like that. So, I think it'd be good if it was seen as a you know, you look back in it and it's like this was the start of us doing a lot more of that work, that would be really positive legacy, but it'd also be a really great legacy if it, you know, I know we got lots of school groups into Kelvingrove and things like that, it'll also be a really great legacy for me if it was something that, you know, lots of

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school kids in Glasgow came to and it was where they, it helped them to learn and understand more about the city they might have been born in or the city they've been educated in. I think that sort of impact would be really great as well, I know Kelvingrove, particularly you speak to people from Glasgow, has a lot of fondness in people's hearts in Glasgow, they have lots of people who have a real strong memory of being taken there when they were growing up and things like that. So it'd be good if actually being taken to Kelvingrove and going to *City of Empire* or whatever was seen within that as well and also part of people's memories and associations with Kelvingrove and some of the work that we're trying to do in Kelvingrove as well. And yeah, and hopefully I don't know, it's quite, yeah, and then I guess hopefully it's just it's also not only for Glasgow museums, hopefully it's hopefully it's just seen as, you know, one of the many steps that's happening in the museum sector for it to better address and do better sort of anti racism, decolonisation work and it seems a part of that, and it's seen as the sort of what and it helps Glasgow Museums to be seen as one of the institutions that's doing good work in that space as well.

42:27

Ethan Terry: Yeah, right. I know, I know I promised that was the last question about the exhibit, but you did then also mention the workshops and school visits. So I would like to at least just touch on that. So could you explain a little bit about what those are and what it all entails.

42:46

Curator B: Yeah, of course. So, the school, so schools' workshops are sort of aimed at like late-stage primary school up to secondary school and higher really. And they involve spending time in the display. There's a workshop, [...] they tend to be delivered by our learning assistants, and they just focus on a sort of like different activities within the display space. So, I think some of it is, you know, shown them David Hayman video getting him to think about what this means for Glasgow. There's activities that are around exploring, like the products of empires are talking about things like sugar, things like tobacco, things like cotton, you know, being quite clear, you know, how are they made? what were they used for? to show the scale of, you know, what this, you know, the enslavement of people in Virginia and the Caribbean leads to in Glasgow and things like that and connecting it to like the everyday of people in Glasgow as well. And also, I guess we have a lot of like activities around language as well. So, we're trying to show you know like the differences, I guess the differences in what using seemingly similar words can mean for talking about this topic, so I guess one of the really like key examples of that

might be talking about what the difference is between calling someone who was enslaved, you know, like calling them enslaved or calling them a slave, and the different sort of meanings of power within those words, but also one of the things we speak about is talking about the differences and how you class and talk about like a revolution or revolt led by enslaved people. You know, like, if you call it a rebellion, that makes it sound like it's something that they shouldn't have been doing when actually, if they were, you know, fighting against slavery, is that not something that we see today is something they should have done? And like, lots of things like that. And we use it as a way to do like, activities and some of the other galleries in the Kelvingrove as well. So, even though it's based largely in that display space, we also have activities where, like the school group might go into like Scottish identity and art, and they might say, you know, ask them what sort of information is missing in this painting in terms of like talking about its slavery connections, you know what, or do you see a lot, or do you see a lot of information in this gallery about who these people were in the paintings, and use that as a way to be like there isn't. But then if there was, it would say this and it would tell us, you know, how they made their money or how they got the ability to be painted and things like that and sort of, yeah, trying to relate it to other spaces in the building as well.

45:39

Ethan Terry: Yeah. Excellent, excellent. So, like I say, I'm going to shift a little bit more towards the curation side of it [...]

47:00

Ethan Terry: Yeah. And then are there any sort of key differences between *Glasgow - City of Empire* and *Curating Discomfort*? Whether intentional or accidental?

47:15

Curator B: Yeah, I suppose. I guess, I guess one of the keys is like, you know, the *Curating Discomfort* interventions aren't permanent and aren't semi-permanent. So, I guess there's, we, they were always worked on with the, you know, the knowledge that they wouldn't be up forever. I suppose as well like it was, even though sort of *City of Empire* like challenges the way Glasgow museums has done display work before. It probably does it in a different way to *Curating Discomfort*, because *Curating Discomfort* I think is intentionally designed to stand out as different to what is usually on display in Hunterian. It's sort of billed as this is different to what we normally do and it's going to be different in the design and everything else, whereas *City of Empire*, even though it is different to what Glasgow museums has

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normally done, it's still sort of was designed to fit like Kelvingrove's style and fit how Glasgow Museums does displays. And I think that was done from the position of, you know, trying to be quite clear that I guess it's almost like it's trying to outline that this sort of like anti racism and this way of working is part of how Glasgow museums wants to do things now. And so, I guess that's why it was done from that perspective. So yeah, I think there was probably the way to, you know, a lot of similarities I guess in terms of approach and thinking about anti racism and museum space within that and museum's roles within that. But I think a lot of the differences, I guess, come from some of those approaches between, you know, one being interventions and one and standing out in that sense and one being a semi-permanent display. And I guess as well I suppose the Hunterian's sort of audience is slightly different to us. [...] I guess Hunterian it's more thinking of a more like academic audience and that sort of perspective, whereas ours is in a general public, definitely go into both, I guess it's ours, it's probably more thinking it's what maybe thinking less in line with that. But yeah, but I think it's also quite good because you realise how you can have like sort of the value of doing this work in lots of like different types of spaces because then you can have different types of approaches that all complement each other well. I think it's really great having that up the road from *City of Empire*.

49:50

Ethan Terry: Exactly. Would that be something that you would imagine, that'd be something that you'd like, if someone could go from the *City of Empire* and then visit the Hunterian and have those complementary experiences.

50:05

Curator B: Absolutely. And I mean, I think we've seen it already for like uni classes for conferences that have come to Glasgow, you've already seen that people, you know planning it out as they'll go to one then the other and see them both. And I think that's working really well.

50:23

Ethan Terry: Yeah. So, just to talk about some of the co-curator as well. How were they recruited and why were these people chosen like specifically?

50:41

Curator B: Yeah, absolutely. So, so the co-curators, so they were part of a wider project. So, it's like, they Our Shared Cultural Heritage project that was like British Council funded and they funded a group in Manchester and a group in Glasgow. I

guess funding meant, the funding was specifically attached to increasing like the access and representation of sort of young people of South Asian heritage in museum spaces. So that meant all the cohort had to sort of fit that demographic. Even though it is really a really broad demographic. [...] And so yes, it sort of comes about through that and then and that's a part, and that group was recruited through like a sort of wider process that was related to the projects and I think some of it was advertised and some of it was suggestions of young people from like previous youth work and projects who were sort of known to Glasgow Museums and known that they would be potentially interested and be involved as well. So, it's sort of came about that way, I guess sort of not necessarily, as well these things I think of it was done again from the start so I suppose something you always learn from would probably look for like having a bit more of an open recruiting process and stuff like that. But I'm also, I think particularly in this work it can be very valuable to work with people you've worked with before and people you have a lot of trust with [...].

53:03

Ethan Terry: So, I think I'll jump off something you said about it being a lot of young changemakers and I know with, again I'm going to keep comparing it to the *Curating Discomfort*, but I know for that one they had quite a mix of ages in that. Was that, I'm trying to think how to how to say, having only young people to involved in the project, is that something that you have to sort of navigate around at all? Or is that something that you, ok I'll just say, is it, was it a limitation at all or?

54:16

Curator B: Yeah. No, that's a fair question. So, I suppose, I suppose, compared to *Curating Discomfort* the way I would say it was limitation was probably that like diversity of experience. I think personally, I think doing stuff like intergenerationally is really quite key for getting the real mix of experiences, particularly for reflecting on you know, things like slavery and empire. [...] So, I think sometimes having that, you know mixed, I would always prefer to have like a intergenerational group. But I would say that to be fair, like the Changemakers we worked with, even though they're all like a group of young people, they were all sort of like early 20s sort of late stages of uni, so I guess there was a bit more like maturity, experience in that group than you might necessarily have if it was a very young group. So, I suppose it's that thing when you say young people, it can be such a wide range of ages, the majority of things like that. I suppose as well, like I think having a group like that they were very I think because this was like some of the

first work they'd ever done, you know, within the big institution and within a heritage organisation, I think it actually meant they were really good at challenging us and you know asking like actually 'why do Glasgow museums do this in that way'? Things like that, and I think it was a real breath of fresh air for that. Whereas I think sometimes if it was, you know, maybe if it's different groups, there might be not necessarily challenge, but you know that sort of bluntness or that enthusiasm of you even questioning, those things can be you know, you can get it a lot more I think from a group of young people and they were really good at that for. And I think also I guess it just you know it changes, I think it also meant that some of the work with them was focused on things like skills development that hopefully will benefit them and lead to them becoming, you know, like future, well don't necessarily future museums workers, but hopefully, you know, having a strong future in like anti-racist activism or whatever it is they want to do. So, I think there were a lot of benefits in that way and I guess, yeah, I guess the only limitation probably is like lacking that, like, intergenerational, that mix of experiences. But again, that's something that I would probably say if we'd had an intergenerational group of people who are all a South Asian heritage or all of Black Caribbean heritage and stuff like that, I think I'm very much like I think I do prefer the *Curating Discomfort* model of having a, you know, intergenerational inter ethnic intersectional group. But I'm aware with our way of funding works that was never an option for us anyway.

57:24

Ethan Terry: OK. And I imagine, yeah, all of you, like you say, being from ethnic minority backgrounds, did you were you able to draw on your you know parents or grandparents' experiences as well. Like through I imagine it was, I imagine there were conversations there, you know, just talking to parents and grandparents.

57:43

Curator B: Absolutely. Yeah, it played a big, it plays some big parts. I think it influences like everything we all do. So yeah, definitely. And I think as well with like working with the group and working with colleagues, I was aware that there was, you know, actually not that you know, I always sort of bring my personal experiences and personal perspectives into this stuff but I think there were sometimes where actually it was valuable to be able to give that insight. [...]

59:08

Ethan Terry: Well, exactly, yeah. I think something I want to also ask is, I don't know, I don't know exactly what the sort of split is between people's backgrounds in

the co-curators, but was there ever any point sort of any sort of, 'cause everyone's gonna have different opinions, was there ever any like sort of difference of opinion on any interpretations or on how you should proceed with something?

59:58

Curator B: Yeah. Oh yeah, definitely. Came up all the time. I was a big part of it and I think, yeah, I'm trying to think of any particular examples that stand out. I suppose one of the things that probably came up quite a bit, I guess this is more perspective of like adding something to it rather than necessarily being a big debate about it or anything, I suppose one of the things that came up is quite often you know, someone in the project team and the supplies like co-curators and other curators who worked on it, they'll quite often be examples where someone would work on an object to story for an object or whatever and the perspective on that object would very much be from almost like the country where it was from. So, for example, the giant door that's on display the sort of original story that was going to go on, that was all about the James Finley and Co. and their connections to colonial India. And so, I guess a lot of things that one thing that came up quite often with stories like that was actually saying, well, you know, there's a connection to India but what about their connection to the Caribbean? So, there was lots of lots of things added in that were more, like, particularly the editing stage, which were more like, you know, this story adding in where this object connects like multiple places of empire, it isn't just connected to one because we thought that was a good way to show how these histories of empire like link lots and lots of different people and lots and lots of different histories. So, I suppose that was probably one area where there was quite a bit added in and you know sort of needed to be, not in a bad way, but that was probably one area where it was quite you know needs to be quite well explained and justified why we're adding this in and why it's important. But I guess you just get those, so I think it's part of working on display, that's what's quite funny is like you work on it and then if it's a display that's worked on and you were the curator whose field is most linked to it, it gets seen as being something that was like, you know, done by you or whatever and it's quite funny because it's like, that it's worked on by loads of people and that loads of different perspectives and that means we had, you know, loads of different discussions, loads of debates about how to phrase this, how to phrase that. It's just, it really is just part of how it gets written.

1:02:20

Ethan Terry: And yeah, I think it's all along the same lines is, you know, because the British Empire occupied so much of the globe, it would be impossible to

represent every single voice. So, is there ever you know, any sort of challenge about how museums can represent voices or voices that aren't actually represented within the museum staff.

1:02:51

Curator B: I think that's, I mean I think that's where the co-curation in our display, I think that's how a lot of it came about. I know it's the same with *Curating Discomfort* really. I think it's a big challenge for museums. I suppose it's, I suppose part of the issue is as well is that like obviously museums and heritage sector does need to be like far more diverse than it is in lots of ways. Obviously race being one, but also in terms of like disability, lots and lots of basically it turns of all groups but I do think co-curation helps in terms of challenging some of that, because I think changing the profile of a workforce in terms of its diversity can be quite a long process and I guess particularly in the context of there being lots of financial cuts in the heritage sector, it's not necessarily something that's going to be able to be done as quickly as it should be for quite fair reasons. So, I think co-curation definitely really helped for in this project as well as it helped in *Curating Discomfort* for like, you know, adding those voices in and also I guess as well, what's quite valuable is we have lots of different staff within the museum who work with those groups as well and been part of projects like that. They also take those voices in even if the voices aren't necessarily then still present after the project's done.

1:04:19

Ethan Terry: Yeah, I mean, do you think, do you think museums do offer like more opportunity for sort of having a diverse workforce than perhaps other sectors, you know, other professions?

1:04:36

Curator B: Yeah, I think so. I think so. I think they definitely, yeah, I think it was quite interesting with museums is it's quite, I suppose it makes sense when you think of like, you know, like the structure of institutions and power in society and whatever else, but like it is, it's always mad to me, you know, that museums can have such a, like, diverse range of, like, objects and collections can have such a diverse range of sites and types of museums and things like that but then when you look at any study into accessing museum spaces and the museum workforce, and it's like the diversity of the museum workforce is really poor and it's like rarely and most of the workforce is sort of white and middle class and university educated and everything else and it's quite interesting how much that contrast, not only with

what museums have and all the different range of spaces and objects and things like that, but it's also quite interesting how that contrasts actually with who comes into museums as well. So yeah, definitely, I think there could be a really great space for that because there are spaces where people can see, you know, themselves and their life stories actually I think in quite a lot of the objects and quite a lot of the stuff that's there already. So yeah, I think it, I always find it quite weird that as even though it makes complete sense, I do always find it quite weird that museums are so undiverse because they just seem perfect spaces to be far more diverse than they are.

1:06:10

Ethan Terry: Yeah. I mean does, just kind of as well, does outreach at all, like community outreach, does that play a part? Although I know you said, you know financially, Museums have been hit a bit, that I don't know whether that would obstruct that at all?

1:06:31

Curator B: No, I think it does. I think outreach is a big is a big key. I think it's like showing, 'cause I know it wasn't necessarily quite outreach I suppose in the same way but I know that our Our Shared Cultural Heritage project across sort of different museums is not just Glasgow has led to more people from that sort of diverse background working in Glasgow museums. I think a big part of that is actually anything that shows people that museums and spaces they can work in shows them what museum, like, what working in the museum involves and all the different jobs and things like that. I think access to that knowledge can be really powerful. I know it's something we're like, we've done some of, but I guess it's something we could definitely do a lot more of as well. And yeah, I think outreach will be, is something for us to hopefully grow and grow in terms of how we do it. And I guess there's lots of different ways you can do that as well.

1:07:34

Ethan Terry: Absolutely. I think, just to circle back a little actually, just because I realised we haven't actually touched on this, what was the process of choosing the objects to go on display? Was that something that the museum set out or was that kind of or did you have, what did the curators and co-curators have a lot more, did they have freedom to choose that?

1:07:57

Curator B: Yeah. So it was mainly the curators and co-curators [...] it was a lot of going round the resource centre at in Nitshill where most of the collection is in, Kelvin Hall as well. [...] a lot of it was then going around those spaces and seeing objects, you know, talking about the history of objects and things like that and seeing objects, seeing objects that might relate to the key themes of the project. Obviously, there was quite a lot of conservation, important things like that, into what could be displayed and what couldn't and things like that. But yeah, a lot of it was done through curators and co-curators relating to the themes of the project.

1:08:52

Ethan Terry: Thanks. So, I think really final sort of couple of questions: was the sort of co-curating project success and what, how would you approach any sort of future projects?

1:09:15

Curator B: Yeah, absolutely. So, I think, yeah, definitely, I think it was, it's a success. Definitely think it was really quite valuable piece of work and I think, I don't feel like it's too much to say that, I think anyone who worked on the projects described it as really rewarding way to work and a really great way to get a perspective and set of voices represented that museums don't always represent properly to say the least. But I think it would in terms of, would we do it again, I guess we definitely see like co-curations as key to our work moving forward, but [...] I don't know how necessarily co-curate in the exact same way again, I suppose it would take some of what we did in *City of Empire*, particularly around thinking about setting themes and particularly around involving like sort of co-curation voices on some of the digital content like the education video and things like that. And I think, I definitely think about how we can, yeah, I definitely think about maybe slightly different approaches even if it's like using some of the same model that was used in *City of Empire*. So, I think particularly for, particularly for myself, like future co-curation, I would look for it to be more diverse and more intersectional while still making sure that representing the voices of those marginalised previously by museums are represented still because I think that was a real strength for this co-curation as that it was centred around that. And yeah, I've heard its, yeah. I think it's being aware of trying to strike that balance because I think, as great as it was to have that sort of object label writing as part of it and things like that, I think it's try to be aware that I think particularly once the display became a permanent one and was then needing to meet the, you know Kelvingrove's style guides and things like that, I think that did make this sort of label writing process a little trickier, and I think that's an area we probably learn

from in terms of if it's going to be display that has to meet the Glasgow Museums' conventional style, that might make it trickier to have co-curated labels because that is a, that is a skill that I guess you get really used to if you work at Glasgow Museums, but very fairly if you don't work at Glasgow museums, you're doing a co-curating project getting told, you know, it's like 30 words that can seem, you know, that can be quite tricky. And I do, yeah, so I think it's try to figure out the balance of that in terms of labour writing, but then I think co-curation for like the intervention labels that are up through Kelvingrove was perfect because I think actually having that extra space is great for that sort of work. So try. Yeah, I think it's been really good for sort of figuring out what works in terms of co-curation and what may be doesn't work as well.

1:12:26

Ethan Terry: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. I know I said one final question but one final question.

1:12:32

Curator B: No, no of course.

1:12:35

Ethan Terry: Because you mentioned the word limit, was that was that a learning curve for some? 'Cause I assume not everyone involved in this project had worked in museums before, so was that a learning curve for them?

1:12:48

Curator B: Yeah. I mean, yeah, it was massive, [...] I think it's maybe an area where it's trickier to co-curate because it is, I guess it's like part of the, you know, the real key skills like a curator at Glasgow Museums job is to be able to do that and I think it's an area where maybe actually if we're doing co-curation that's like a another way to represent a voice which is maybe more doing that work on the co-curating group with like key themes. So then, it's like they're trusting us to represent their voice through how we write it because it is, yeah, I don't, yeah, it is quite it is, it can be quite tricky sometimes and I completely get it.

1:13:49

Ethan Terry: OK. Well right, I promise that was the last one, so I'll end the recording now but thank you so much for your time.

Transcription end 1:14:02

## Appendix 6: Patterson transcript

Interview with David Patterson (The Hunterian's Visitor Experience Team Leader)

June 23, 2024, 16:06pm

18m 42s

Ethan Terry: started transcription

0:05

Ethan Terry: Perhaps actually just to start we could talk a little bit about that meeting you had with Zandra [Curator of Discomfort].

0:11

David Patterson: Uh there was a few of us, there was Kelvinhall and we went down to a Wednesday meeting and it was my turn as team leader so I was doing that and to, the discussion about repatriation of stuff. This is going back a couple of years so for instance the centre spine had changed. So I was just sat in and it was explained to us and then Zandra came out and explained to all the team what the thoughts of her process was and what the process was going to be. Yeah, that was quite interesting.

0:44

Ethan Terry: Gotcha, and you say sort of changing the central spine, how, what was it like before? In what way has it changed?

0:53

David Patterson: It's still mostly the same displays are in the base and obviously apart from that the colour and different colours. So not really a great change, the colour and what its representing.

1:10

Ethan Terry: Gotcha

1:11

David Patterson: And slightly different stories on the display on the exhibits.

1:14

Ethan Terry: So would you say it particularly sort of differs at all from sort of the other displays in the Hunterian especially in the main hall area.

1:24

David Patterson: Yeah, I think because of what its discussing and the reason its doing it. And it makes people, it's sort of very marmite-y exhibition where folk think its fantastic and others absolutely hate it. There's no really in between sort thing, it's sort of, again you see it with the comments, with the comment cards there, and that's processed as well just feedback back to Zandra and back to her supervisors. So yeah, it's very uh very different.

2:01

Ethan Terry: Yeah, um, and as part of visitor experience, I guess would you, do you know if its particularly aimed at any target audience in particular or whether it has been a sort of audience that resonated [with it]?

2:14

David Patterson: No, I think its targeted to the visitor that come here. They are, the Hunterian, are trying to get more from the Glasgow area to come in to the museum and the wider parts of Glasgow not just the postcodes G11-G12 round here but further afield to different areas of Glasgow. And so there doing some work in that and I think we're getting a lot of interest from the people in the Glasgow area. The visitors certainly comment as well and personally had a couple from Australia who were really impressed with that, you know, they were talking about the aboriginal thing and what they've been through, and they thought it was a fantastic idea. So we've got a lot of people from all over the world coming and there's a lot of comments about it: positive and negative, mainly positive I've got to say.

3:08

Ethan Terry: Thats good, I think it was ... earlier who said that you don't particularly advertise locally, is that right?

3:15

David Patterson: Well, we don't, I was trying to, in fact I was talking about that to my colleague across the road there, they're trying to get folk from all over Glasgow, you know sort of the working-class areas and more deprived areas that are known as deprived in Glasgow. So, they're going to be doing leaflet drops and things, and whether that works or not I don't know. I'm from Glasgow and started

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in the uni 13 years ago, I never once came in here in all honesty. So, when I engage with the visitor, a lot of Glasgow people have never been before and you think ‘wow what have I missed?’, you know even like the *Curating Discomfort* if you only think that’s interesting, definitely that positive move forward, a lot of comments been made.

4:05

Ethan Terry: Absolutely, I mean ‘cause I, you know, when I had my first semester here, we were brought here by the uni and obviously it being part of the university it was one of their first steps was like get us all in there. Perfect, so I think we already, actually well in the discussions you had in that first meeting did you at all about why they wanted it to be in the centre of the main hall?

4:36

David Patterson: They just thought that was the best place for it because the exhibits of the people you read through it, obviously it links to the slave trade, obviously some things are linked to the slave trade and all that sort of thing and other things maybe taken or stolen or don’t know what’s happened with this stuff. I think in that central area a lot of people had connections to various things at that time and that’s why they decided just to keep it there. And it is a focal point that central bit, I don’t know if you’ll find if a lot of people have been looking over the weekend but certainly they looked upon it as a central point. And you’ve got to go round it if, you know what I mean, to see other, so they got to go round that.

5:19

Ethan Terry: Well, it’s interesting based on the findings that I’ve got over the last couple of days, but it does seem like there’s a definite pathway for visitors and it misses half of it but then circles back round for the second half, so yeah I’ll definitely write about that.

5:40

David Patterson: I think that’s that, personally I think that its the ideal spot for it. You can’t miss it, you can’t avoid it because you’ve got to go round it to view anything in the museum you have to, as you’ve seen, have to go round it.

5:55

Ethan Terry: Absolutely, I think you mentioned some of the themes like slavery and that. One question I have for all my interviews has been about the school system

and school education and like, sort of, whether they bring enough attentions to those kind of themes. What was your experience?

6:19

David Patterson: Well, I'm obviously a lot older. I had no, nothing spoken about slave trade, nothing at all. It was very much, when I grew up in Glasgow in was mainly white and that was it basically. So, there was never any mention of it. I don't know it was of its time I suppose, it's much better now. My granddaughters are getting into their heads, they came here specifically, and they're primary school specifically, to look at the centre. So, her teacher was wanting them to see this so that's part of they're getting taught about that and there's an interest in it. So, it's a positive, and it's nice to see actually because I grew up in the years where people of different colours, different religions were treated differently and I saw that you know sadly but that was then. But it's a big, definitely a big change.

7:19

Ethan Terry: And you think, *Curating Discomfort*, do you think that's had a positive sort of impact

7:26

David Patterson: It's made a lot of people think. And I had a couple in, not long after it opened, and speaking to them and explaining and I said to them the story about William Hunter and about this new exhibit and he said 'why are you giving stuff back' and I said 'go and have a look at it'. And then they came back after and said 'I have to apologise for the way I spoke to you', he says 'I totally get it' he said. And I thought well that's a positive result. And that's what Zandra wants, she wants folk to talk about it and to discuss it, and ok if you disagree then disagree with it. You can't hate it. I think Zandra doesn't want folk to hide from it, it did happen and it's got to be taken on board.

8:17

Ethan Terry: Absolutely, so, not to, I know it's not really you're sort of area but perhaps another question sort of generally is talking about museum staff and sort of diversity within museum staff and whether, sort of, how can museums perhaps represent voices or cultures that maybe aren't represented in the staff? How can they do that?

9:00

David Patterson: Well, I do most interviews with the visitor experience team and you've got to look at the people who are applying and try and widen the scope of it. I think in our team we're well represented by everything, so I think and we're probably, we're a happy team as well and we all got on and they all understand. So, I think it obviously starts off with your interviews and making sure you're trying to get as many different people on board interviewing and see. And we've been fortunate enough to do that.

9:40

Ethan Terry: Yeah definitely, and I think another question is what's been the short or perhaps even long term of *Curating Discomfort* on visitors or even within the sort of staff?

9:56

David Patterson: All the staff were obviously given an interview after getting told about what's happening by Zandra as well. We have a weekend team and a weekday staff. So, the teams meetings, talked about it and explained the reasons for it and it's always good for staff to get that kind of thing. We've had in the past where there may be an exhibition and they're asking 'what this all about?' and not being told. And then the curator will come along and say this is it and then you know. So, Zandra told us right away what was happening, a welcome in and we took on board. And I think the vast majority of us totally understand and totally agree with the university for trying to do it, and I think Glasgow was one of the first universities to do this, possibly the first I'm not too sure. But I know they've been leading the way on that.

10:47

Ethan Terry: Was there any at all, any, I don't know what the word, maybe pushback at all?

10:54

David Patterson: From the staff? No, no. All the staff, they're all clever cookies, they're all ex-students here or the School of Art. So, they'll take anything on board and really embraced it to be honest, took an interest in it, learned about it and various things. And it coincides with, we actually had a, and this is digressing a little bit, last two years ago we had an exhibition in the chapel across the road and that was to do with aboriginal forgotten children and that was a wonderful exhibition, very small but I made sure all the staff were open to it and it got us talking same as it got us talking about the middle section you know, we all talk

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about it. And we always get comments whether or not, and we just placed a comments book in it and comments cards, and a lot of people said 'I'm angry about this, why is this happening? Why is it a thing that happened? What can we do about it?'. Well, you give the stuff back to the people who should have it back and that's the talking point. So, I think the visitor, most of the visitors will come in and maybe don't know it's there because it's not really advertised very well, I don't think it advertised very well. It was at the time but now it's not, it's just there. But folks and you can see them actually, I don't know if you've noticed, they take an interest, the one's that do take an interest do really read everything round about.

12:22

Ethan Terry: Yeah, yeah.

12:24

David Patterson: So, I think it's definitely a talking point and it makes people think.

12:31

Ethan Terry: Do you tend to find its maybe individuals who come back with feedback or like groups, or is it just a mix?

12:40

David Patterson: It's just mixed. I have to say, at the beginning, the vast majority of people who moaned and complained about it and couldn't understand about it were of the older generation. Younger people just think it's fantastic but that's what we find. But a lot of people are coming back and we have had repeat visitors coming back just to look at it and most of the staff you'll see talk to people about the floor and find out what their thoughts are. I always like to know what people think about but I think at the beginning it was certainly the older generation who didn't quite understand, were more negative and then you went to the middle age and the younger students or younger visitors who totally got it.

13:28

Ethan Terry: Yeah absolutely. Uh so, I think yesterday we briefly talked about the Jamaican Giant Galliwasp, so I would like to quickly talk about that actually. I know the sign says it's been taken down to be studied and eventually returned but you said that

13:57

David Patterson: It's been returned yeah. There was a delegation come over, and I can't remember if it was this year or the tail end of last year. But a lovely group of people and they had a great time and were given tours round about. After that was an official handing over ceremony. So that was interesting.

14:18

Ethan Terry: Do you know at all what the sort of plan now is for that part of the display because obviously it's gone now.

14:24

David Patterson: Well apparently we have another one so,

14:27

Ethan Terry: Oh haha

14:28

David Patterson: A smaller one so I'm told. So, they may well do that. But they haven't really, it's very, very slow when it comes to doing stuff like this and they have discussion and discussion before anything's done. So, I don't know what's happening to be honest with you.

14:48

Ethan Terry: I mean would it be, is it almost, because you know the whole thing is about certain objects being in a museum when they're not from this county, is it almost considered like a success if one has been given back?

15:05

David Patterson: I think it's a new concept isn't it? Doing, sending things back with Glasgow again being one of the first. So, I think it's been positive and I think it's a good thing if it goes back personally. The director and Zandra, who deals with kind of thing, were in Australia last year and she was telling me that they were working on giving stuff back to there. What it is I don't know but that's why they were over there, to have discussions as well. So, there's always things going on and things to go back.

15:41

Ethan Terry: Do you know whether that's something that Zandra or the higher-ups were pursuing or whether someone's come to them?

15:49

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David Patterson: Well, I don't know that but Steph, our director, is for this so whether it came from him as well as a driving force. I've got a feeling that its maybe him that's been pushing this. So, fair play and it's good to see and I guess it gets us noticed as well and it gets us more visitors coming and they read about it and its interesting.

16:11

Ethan Terry: I was going to say yeah, I imagine it gets publicised.

16:16

David Patterson: Of course yeah, and least of all with that the ... was advertised ... and the amount of interest in that was phenomenal. And that got a press release and the BBC were up as well. So, one small thing and it's just phenomenal. And again, a lot of people when they've read about the Jamaican visit, people came to talk about that and see if there was anything interesting.

16:44

Ethan Terry: And did you say that the sort of delegates from Jamaica came to the university?

16:49

David Patterson: They came here yeah, they met the principal, they had tea and coffee and things and there was a presentation ceremony. They were here as well, they had a tour around here and a tour of the art gallery as well. So yeah, they had a good time and it was nice to see them.

17:02

Ethan Terry: Yeah definitely, so is that, with the lizard, is that one of the first or even the first repatriation here?

17:12

David Patterson: I think that's the first repatriation and it'll be the first of many I think. But how long it takes, I don't know, I don't know where they are with that. Once they decide, then we'll obviously get told about it. But at this moment in time there's been nothing else discussed but I do know that actively we're looking at repatriating stuff.

17:35

Ethan Terry: I think maybe perhaps final question would be, I spoke to someone at the Kelvingrove about the *City of Empire* exhibit they've got there, and they mentioned that they've found that people do go from there to here or vice versa. Is that something that you've personally experienced? Have you heard anyone talking or comparing it to the Kelvingrove at all?

18:01

David Patterson: No, no, no. In fact, we had the Kelvingrove staff up and had a tour round about here but we have still to be doing there. But no, I haven't heard anything to be honest, nothing at all.

18:14

Ethan Terry: Well, there you go, if you wanted to know.

18:17

David Patterson: Usually, if anyone asks or talks about Kelvingrove it's just directions to Kelvingrove and they've been to us first.

18:24

Ethan Terry: No, I think they mentioned that a couple university groups had visited both.

18:32

David Patterson: I don't know, I'd be telling a lie if I said yes.

18:36

Ethan Terry: That's fair enough haha, but yeah, I think that's all I have to ask from you at the moment. But yeah thank you.

Transcription end 18:42

## Appendix 7: Visitor Experience employee A transcript

Interview with Hunterian Visitor Experience employee A

June 30, 2024, 15:46pm

13m 56s

To ensure anonymity, anything that can be used to identify the participant or anyone else referred to at any point in the interview has been redacted. Where text has been removed for anonymisation, I have inserted [...] in its place.

Ethan Terry: started transcription

0:04

Ethan Terry: So yeah, main question, sort of first question really is how does, in your opinion, *Curating Discomfort* differ from other exhibits in the Hunterian? Is there anything that sets it apart at all?

0:20

Visitor Experience employee A: Yeah, well I think the main difference is highlighting the dubious provenance of so many of our objects. I think it's sometimes lacking in a deeper sort of, like, understanding of exactly where some of the objects come from or how they came to us or why do we still hold them. But I think it does a better job at asking questions that typically museums don't like to ask, which is: 'why we have this in the first place?', 'why is it here at all?' rather than just trying to explain the origin of it as if it just sort of appeared in the collection almost by magic.

1:12

Ethan Terry: So, I mean, you mentioning it doing it better but there still being perhaps space for improvement like what would, if you were to be involved in a sort of update, what would you prioritise perhaps?

1:29

Visitor Experience employee A: I think it was a very good first step, I think there was some really commendable things that the project has done for this space and for the museum. I think the scope of it too limited, I'm not sure the museum wanted to make it as big or as impactful as it could have been. I think there's certain things that feel, that little word-map to me feels a little childish in terms of what the research is actually talking about and what the exhibition is trying to accomplish. And I think that the objects that were removed from display actually were some, well actually no there's some really problematic stuff in the middle row as well but I wish they'd done a more complete or more holistic sort of like rejigging of the space because it feels like, to me it feels like they said 'you can have this middle bit and only this bit and nothing else' and they couldn't touch

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anything else. They couldn't touch anything in the cases, it was only the middle bay that they could work with. And, I don't know, to me it just felt like they were afraid of going like any further than that and making any more substantial changes that would be quite hard to reverse in case like I don't know we're not happy with it, because the last time they did that was I don't know maybe 20 years ago that they refurbished the main hall of the museum. So, some of those new cases upstairs and all the new cases and everything else, you know, pretty much been set in place for 20 years and I think they were just afraid, you know, of like moving too many things around or maybe they didn't have to the scope, I don't know. It feels like they didn't just go far enough.

3:52

Ethan Terry: Gotcha. I do know in, I think, one of the panels in the introduction it does encourage the visitor to try and look at the *Curating Discomfort* with a critical eye and then use that elsewhere in the museum. Do you think that in any way does increase the scope, you know, in a sense that they couldn't expand the physical space but were able to get perhaps visitors to maybe change their mindset towards the rest of the museum?

4:34

Visitor Experience employee A: I think for some people definitely, you know, I think with some people that have really paid attention and, you know, we've got some really lovely feedback from people where they're like in-person at the desk leaving the museum or in the little cards that we have for feedback. I know for sure that some people are paying attention and some people are interested, I don't think that most people stop to read the text, which you know is the nature of text in museums and sort of how people want to pay attention to the things they're looking at. I think for the most part though, I'm not sure that people will make that connection. I think for the most part people won't even make that connection with *Curating Discomfort* because, you know, for you to be able to make that connection of critique you would have to stop for more than just a second to like not just look at the objects but read the texts and kind of figure out what's going on. And other people are not going to do that, other people don't speak English, other people don't have that capacity or the time, you know people are just running about. I think for those that are engaged I hope that perhaps it will do something like that but unfortunately for most they will still look at everything else like some sort of like object and that bothers me.

6:20

Ethan Terry: That makes sense. I think perhaps this'll be the final question just to keep it brief.

6:29

Visitor Experience employee A: Sure

6:30

Ethan Terry: I mean, how have you found visitors, is there any noticeable difference between visitors interacting with that space and the rest of the museum or in terms of the questions or feedback they might ask? Has there been any difference?

6:48

Visitor Experience employee A: I think definitely in terms of the like wide variety of feedback that we get from people. I think usually in the museum, because it's so broad and there's so many objects, unless somebody is looking specifically for something or somebody finds a very particular object really enchanting you don't tend to get that feedback. But *Curating Discomfort* is kind of highlighted, so I think it's basically what I was saying before, if people are coming in and are paying attention and they're reading and they're like looking through it, most of the feedback I've seen anyway has been positive and sort of being thankful to the museum for being like doing this kind of work. Some of it is critical in an actual constructive kind of way although not most of it because you know most people aren't sort of familiar with these kind of discourses and critiques. And some of it is straight up just like, you know, 'this is the woke propaganda mob, be proud of your country', you know, kind of, people from the US.

8:09

Ethan Terry: From the US?

8:10

Visitor Experience employee A: Yeah, a lot of people, a lot of tourists from the US like literally using the word woke on the feedback forms being like 'oh you should be proud of your heritage, we come from the US and that's our country and we're not afraid to say so' and it's like ok uh sure.

8:34

Ethan Terry: Missing the point.

8:35

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Visitor Experience employee A: But they leave it on the little pamphlet and they leave quietly, so it's usually ok. But yeah, I think for the people that have paid attention it's made a difference and I think it's overall a really positive start. Again, I think it could have gone much further and it could have encompassed, I understand not being able to like move round like the entirety of the museum or like all of it which is problematic, but I would have liked to see more reinterpretations of the texts, not just like, you know, there's this bit where it just explains how these objects came from, what's his name, Captain Cook's visit to New Zealand and it's like oh they just came and Captain Cook's boat but yeah but what happened? What hap...how did we get there and that bothers me because it just sort of like they just went to visit and they just traded like we used to do and we have them now. So interesting isn't it, moving on. Ok sure. And we have a mummy that's half open as if that's not extremely disrespectful to anyone really.

10:08

Ethan Terry: Yeah, yeah especially with how close in proximity it is to the interventions.

10:13

Visitor Experience employee A: Yeah, which is what I find so like, there's sort of like this like dissociation right in between, we're critiquing the museum while also leaving completely intact all of these other objects that are like, you know, still like unethical and just straight up should not be on display.

10:45

Ethan Terry: Um, actually just one final thing

10:50

Visitor Experience employee A: That's fine, there's no rush.

10:51

Ethan Terry: Has there been any, that you're aware of, any further steps taken or any sort of movement to doing more work like *Curating Discomfort*?

11:07

Visitor Experience employee A: There's been a lot of lip service towards what *Curating Discomfort* was supposed to mean, you know, back when *Curating Discomfort* was just going to open and when it had just opened there was a lot of like discussions about what it was going to mean for the rest of the program and

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not just at the museum but at the Art Gallery and who they were working with in terms of like future exhibitions. So far that has mostly fallen flat. I know that they really tried with *Trembling Museum*, I think that was a sort of commendable sort of like trying to go beyond what the museum knows and wants. But for example, Zandra [Curator of Discomfort] was not consulted in that exhibition for example. A lot of the writing for that show came from African like studies and literature written by white people; even one of our colleagues, some of the optics came from her own tribe in Kenya and she critiqued some of the writing about these objects and these curators just completely dismissed her.

12:32

Ethan Terry: Wow.

12:33

Visitor Experience employee A: Right, so there's just this, sort of this lip service of we're doing something and we're acting like we're doing something but it's very superficial, it's very much like we're trying to do this but just not again going far enough. And I remembering when they had this whole Changing [*Trembling*] *Museum* up, but they've moved that now, right. So that was kind of the promise and I feel like they did *Curating Discomfort* and now it's sort of like just sort of calmed down about it. They're still doing a lot of work behind the scenes, which I'm not privy to, like all the repatriation and all the other stuff that obviously I just don't have access to as front of house. But yeah, it's not good enough, you know, it's just not good enough. For an institution that who has the time and resources and staff that it has, it's just not good enough.

13:50

Ethan Terry: Ok and I think end it there.

13:53

Visitor Experience employee A: Cool yeah.

13:54

Ethan Terry: But thank you very much for that.

13:55

Visitor Experience employee A: Of course, I'm happy to help

13:56

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Ethan Terry: Perfect.

Transcription end 13:56

## Appendix 8: Visitor Experience employee B transcript

Interview with Hunterian Visitor Experience employee B

June 30, 2024, 16:02pm

7m 59s + 0m 54s

To ensure anonymity, anything that can be used to identify the participant or anyone else referred to at any point in the interview has been redacted. Where text has been removed for anonymisation, I have inserted [...] in its place.

Ethan Terry: started transcription

0:03

Ethan Terry: So, first sort of general question is, with *Curating Discomfort*, how would you say it differs from the sort of more traditional displays or exhibits in the Hunterian?

0:15

Visitor Experience employee B: So, it, rather than providing simply just the knowledge of what the object is or where it comes from, I would say that the *Curating Discomfort* exhibit, it kind of delves a bit deeper into where and why the object, or where the object came from and why it came there. So, it is more closely looking at the past of colonial exploit I suppose, the trade roots and where objects have come from in a, I want to say a more negative light I suppose rather than...

0:58

Ethan Terry: Critical maybe or?

1:00

Visitor Experience employee B: Critical yes. So, it examines where an object is from and delves a bit deeper into the truth of its history rather than just telling you what the object is.

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1:13

Ethan Terry: Yeah definitely. How has, sort of, your experience in the visitor experience team, how have you seen people react to it? What's the sort of feedback or maybe even questions you've been asked?

1:32

Visitor Experience employee B: What's quite interesting is, so obviously you get people who come in, they just look at it and they move on, but I have had a few people coming to question me on why we have it and why it's needed. And what is actually quite interesting about the people who have asked this is they are normally older and, I don't want to put a disparity on anything, but they are white basically. So, what interests me is that the people who tend to be asking the most questions about it are the people that it's almost like in effect are being targeted by it, like they are the people who need to know about it because they've not been taught about it in their schooling. So, that's what I've definitely noticed with it yeah.

2:34

Ethan Terry: And when you say, sorry just then were you talking about positive or negative feedback?

2:45

Visitor Experience employee B: It started off quite, I want to say quite negative because it was like 'oh we don't need any of this. Why is this here?' but then once I explained it a bit they were a bit like 'oh ok yeah I understand'. I'm not saying that that has been the all of the people I have spoken to about it, there's been quite a lot of people that have, they've actually talked to me and said 'oh that's really good that as a museum you are doing this cause it's quite unusual to see it done in this way, it's quite unusual to see these narratives expressed'. So, I would say it's mainly been positive or it's been initially negative and been moved on to a positive outcome after having been explained.

3:35

Ethan Terry: Gotcha, that's good. Also, perhaps a question [about] when you were at school was like these sort of topics of colonialism and empire and slavery, were they ever addressed in your personal experience?

3:56

Visitor Experience employee B: Not in my personal experience. Through primary school, you are never taught about that or at least in my experience we were not. We learned an awful lot about the wars but from my own personal experience, anything to do with colonialism, anything to do with the Transatlantic Slave Trade was reserved for if you actually took history to a higher or advanced higher level. It was never discussed below that level.

4:31

Ethan Terry: That tracks with what I've come across. [...]

4:52

Ethan Terry: I guess sort of final question [...], since *Curating Discomfort* came in has there been any sort of significant further steps or general big-picture or small-scale changes that you've noticed within the museum?

5:17

Visitor Experience employee B: I don't, I don't really know. So, what I have definitely noticed is that people come into museums usually just because they want to learn something new, right, which is what *Curating Discomfort* does. But then beyond that, beyond the learning something new, beyond the learning from a different perspective, there's not really been anything to follow up on that. I know from the museum side of things that it's mainly due to funding, it's hard to carry on projects like these to a further degree because you would need funding to do so. But obviously that's not great. And I think from my own experience, I haven't seen any way which it has significantly altered the experience that people have when they come to the museum.

6:27

Ethan Terry: Gotcha. Out of interest, what is, what do you usually get feedback about?

6:33

Visitor Experience employee B: About? We don't, it's strange, we don't tend to, we do have feedback forms and things. We normally get a lot of feedback for the art gallery, for the museum not as much and I'm not entirely sure why. We did have a few things, a few leaflets for the *Curating Discomfort* and it was give us your feedback, how did you find this experience. And we have had quite a lot of people, definitely at the beginning when *Curating Discomfort* had just come in, we got a lot of these leaflets and they were basically saying 'this is really good', 'this is really

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impactful' or on the opposite side it would say 'we don't really need this', 'why is this here?'. But it was mainly positive feedback but that has kind of stopped the older the project has become if that makes sense?

7:28

Ethan Terry: Yeah, yeah.

7:29

Visitor Experience employee B: So now it's kind of, the feedback that we do get is mainly for things like the Antonine Wall and some of the natural history exhibits. At least that's my kind of experience, people have said to 'oh I really like this' or 'oh the architecture'

7:52

Ethan Terry: Ok brill. I think best end it there.

Transcription end 7:52

[After ending the recording, the participant thought of one further comment. So, the recording was restarted.]

0:00

Visitor Experience employee B: It's just one more comment and it's what I've noticed is that people love things that are new. It's the same with any exhibition you go to, you do have people who go to places for the nostalgia and they take their kids and that sort of thing. But when it comes to the rest of the general public it tends to be like you go somewhere because you hear that there's a new kind of exhibit going on and then after that you don't go back because you've seen the new exhibit. And it's almost like in order to keep people [participant snaps their fingers three times] kind of aware or coming back to learn more things it needs to be [snaps fingers again five times], it needs to be a continuous project, it can't just be [knocks on table] this is one thing and that's it, we're done, end of story, we're not discussing this again.

0:50

Ethan Terry: Absolutely.

0:52

Visitor Experience employee B: So, that was just my last point.

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Transcription end 0:54

## Appendix 9: Visitor Experience employee C transcript

Interview with Hunterian Visitor Experience employee C

June 30, 2024, 16:39pm

23m 06s

To ensure anonymity, anything that can be used to identify the participant or anyone else referred to at any point in the interview has been redacted. Where text has been removed for anonymisation, I have inserted [...] in its place.

Ethan Terry: started transcription

0:02

Ethan Terry: So, the first question I'm asking is just a sort of general question. So, how would you say that *Curating Discomfort* differs from the sort of traditional exhibits or displays in the rest of the Hunterian? Is there anything that makes it stand out in any way?

0:17

Visitor Experience team member: Well, the chief [thing] that makes it stand out is obviously it's kind of subject matter. It's sort of directly confronting a topic that, while maybe present in other displays, it was taking a proactive stance on post-colonial/colonial history of it. It's making that very much its focus but commenting on the sort of structures that have brought these objects into the university. So, while you might have objects from the colonial past in other cases, typically they're treated in an ethnographic fashion rather than directly applying the sort of concept of this is a post-colonial [inaudible].

0:57

Ethan Terry: Absolutely, and would you say that the project has been successful or?

1:08

Visitor Experience team member: Depends on the metric of success. I think if you're looking at it from an institutional point of view, it's been very successful. We've gotten plaudits, we've gotten many other institutions saying 'oh it's great',

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you know, 'you're really doing good work'. So, we've come out of this looking very well. In terms of actually advancing the cause of decolonising museums or even really raising awareness of colonial history, I think the answer might be more mixed. I think in terms of actually advancing the cause of removing colonial power structures in the museum, I'd say it's had almost no effect at all.

1:43

Ethan Terry: Ok

1:45

Visitor Experience team member: And I think if you want me to sort of couch that, I'd say it's partly because the people who are really excited about it were always going to agree in the first place. We have not had busloads of, you know, well racists quite frankly coming away from it saying 'you know, you make some valid points'. But equally, they're also not people it'd appeal to, it's really that middle ground of people who haven't thought about it, who hadn't really had an opinion until that point. If you can convert them, then that's really the metric of success and I haven't seen any evidence of that.

2:18

Ethan Terry: Is it, because you talk about, sort of, converting, perhaps has it sort of raised awareness at all without, it doesn't necessarily have to be about converting but has it

2:34

Visitor Experience team member: I think it has certainly started the conversation. 'Started the conversation' is a terribly jargonistic response, 'we've started the conversation', which is generally a prelude to not having a conversation. But it has in many ways ripped the plaster off just doing something whatever form that might take and that has, I think, opened the door to other things in the museum. So, it has been successful in that regard, in that having that initial step of doing it, and it was a fairly confrontational thing at the time, it tended to be so, I think has been quite important. We've since had other exhibitions and displays that have perhaps leant more heavily into the sort of topic matter than maybe it would have done before. So, I think the genie's out the bottle as it were. And that has been a positive, I think it's been important and been valuable.

3:29

Ethan Terry: And, you know, as visitor experience staff what has your sort of experience been with feedback or like just in general like how you've seen people interacting with the space?

3:44

Visitor Experience team member: If I'm honest, chief notable thing is that most people don't interact with the space. A lot of people don't make a beeline for it. If they are looking at the objects, they're looking at the objects and not the sort of interventionist caveats that the installation actually provides are not that interested. Nor do I think in the display is there any real effort to make them interested. So, chiefly its people looking for dinosaurs or looking for the scientific exhibits or something they've come specifically for. I think if they do take in *Curating Discomfort* exhibit, they go 'oh that's interesting' and then move on with their lives and never think about it again. Some people do have quite strong opinions but again these tend to be people who were always going to have these opinions in the first place really no matter what you were saying. People who dislike it and take time out of their day to let you, a random stranger, know that they dislike it were probably never going to like it no matter what we could have done, they were never going to like this. Equally, a lot of people who are heaping praise on it, and maybe I'm generalising here, were always probably going to be pretty enthusiastic just because that's what it is, that's the subject matter that they enjoy that, that they think is worthwhile.

5:05

Ethan Terry: And I think, when we spoke last weekend, you had some sort of ideas on where you would like the museum to sort of go. What would your to, sort of, increasing engagement or spreading that awareness?

5:21

Visitor Experience team member: Yeah, well I think one of the things with the current installation is that the current installation doesn't engage. It really doesn't engage with its audience. I mean it's fine, I think we discussed last week, if you have read a lot of post-colonial theory then it's marvelous. You know what this is and you know what the conversation topics are and there's lot to riff off of, oh it's a fantastic time. If you haven't, I think the analogy we use is that if you're a joiner with your kids out for a day, there's nothing to keep you there. You have maybe 10-20 seconds to sort of convince people that this is an exhibit worth looking at and tellingly most people are wandering off more or less inside that bracket. They might skim round or look at it but they're really not taking the time to engage with

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this. I think part of the problem is that it doesn't engage, it doesn't attempt to say 'this is what this is and this is why it matters to you' or to try and couch that in a way that is interesting. It's very dry; where it's not dry it's quite confrontational in a way that doesn't stimulate dialogue or conversation. It say 'this was this and this is appalling', obviously I'm generalising there but, you know, it takes the stance that 'bad'. Oh great, you don't feel like you can, kind of, come back to that. It's just 'that's bad', ok that's bad, great, moving on. Its that sort of generalised style of didactic, it is didactic as many other cases in the gallery. We now criticise it for 'oh yes, it just tells you what to think' and equally it doesn't offer any solutions. The displays will readily drag up - I say 'drag up' as if they're doing something wrong, it really quite important - but they readily, sort of, construct narratives around 'this was wrong and this was wrong' but never actually enters into 'and this is what is being done about it' or 'this is what we could do about it'. It just proffers a series of broadly historic wrongs and, you know, it's not a difficult case to make that the British Empire did some bad stuff. What's difficult to do is actually relate that to people in the first instance; 'this is what the British Empire did and this is how this continues to be an issue'. Especially in a subject where so much of the historicity is still relevant and is still extant and continuing to affect peoples' lives to not try and link that seems very odd to me. And again, what is there if you're a sort of, you're not reading post-colonial literature, you're really just in for a day out, maybe you've got a passing interest in that sort of thing but I'm going to go out on a limb here and say most people aren't in favour of bringing back slavery when they read this - and I do say most because I have read the comment box, I know the true depths of humanity. But, you know, most people are generally on board but broadly ambivalent. Like yes, the broad theme is 'do you think racism's bad?', well yeah but am I lying awake thinking about the crippling injustices in our society? No. And I think that's what the, the display sort of misses the point that a lot of people who see this haven't really thought about this stuff and they probably won't think about it much in their lives at all. And never attempts to say 'this is why you should' or maybe 'next time you see this, you should consider x or y'.

Equally, it doesn't even engage with the communities that are in the displays. There's a Māori club and it asks the question nicely 'what would it mean to the Māori community if this club was returned?'. The Māori are still around, you can ask. They're on Facebook. They have officers in the Australian government you can contact. Or the New Zealand government. I'm thinking of the Aborigines. But we've got Aboriginal artifacts as well. There's no attempt to reach out. [...] Talking about Paraffin Young, 'he discovered an early form of fracking and fracking's bad for the environment' and well he lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We didn't have the same scientific that we did now. How could he have known? He didn't even know what

the ozone layer was. And so, to combine the two, yes fracking is bad for the environment but how could James Paraffin Young have known that?

10:13

Ethan Terry: So, applying modern ethics

10:14

Visitor Experience team member: Yes, it's quite anachronistic. And I think part of the problem and one of the tensions in the display is that the community curators, who I'm sure are all fabulous people who have done fabulous things and I'm not trying to lay dispersions to them, I think there was a touch of these people didn't have an academic background in these objects. And if the argument is, as I think it was, that these were people from ethnic minority groups who had experienced racism and, sort of, colonialism and were now going to write on these objects as a way of kind of reclaiming that. That's fine. But if you don't have a personal cultural connection to this object, how is that better than me writing on it?

10:53

Ethan Terry: Yeah

10:55

Visitor Experience team member: And I'm not denying these people's experiences added a valid dimension to this or that their experiences of racism or colonial structures within educational system is in any way to be discounted but unless this is your culture and you have a personal engagement with this and you have experience with this, if it's just an object you've picked out because its foreign and kind of lines up with what you want to talk about, how is that any better than what's already being done? At least I got a degree in this stuff, and again that's not to sneer at anyone's background, but how is a journalist writing on, I don't know, an African amulet, and this journalist is perhaps Scottish, born in Scotland from the African diaspora or the descent, kind of background or that, well great but that sort of misses the point. I think it would have been much better to go to the community where possible; you have the Māori, the Aborigines, they now have legal government level representation and they're very accessible, they're on WhatsApp so ask them. Rather than sort of raking around for again people who do think about this, you've got activists, you've got journalists and you've got community operators, people out there doing really good work with decolonisation and kind of anti-racist activities, but who are not academics, and again that is not to sneer at anyone, I'm sure they're entirely capable of researching and writing an object, but,

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you know, I don't necessarily see the benefit of that. You've just got another person. And again, these are the people who just nod and say this is a fantastic idea whenever this comes up rather than people you've convinced or have come from the other side as it were. One of the real criticisms that we get is that it's not a balanced account. I think the people making that criticism aren't actually interested in making a balanced account. Typically, when they're writing this down is because it means 'oh you don't agree with what I think'. But equally, I think there's a problem within the display in that it tends to choose narrative over history. And I'm not saying that there's no room for both but I think they quite often get carried away with making the example that 'this object is from this person and this person is bad'. Well yes obviously, there was a merchant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its not difficult to make a moral judgement. So yeah, I think that is one of the main weaknesses in the display in that it doesn't really engage at all. Sorry we got away from your question.

13:33

Ethan Terry: No, no, not at all. So yeah, what sort of techniques have you found are best for engaging people.

13:45

Visitor Experience team member: It sounds really stupid but just talking to people about it. One of the weaknesses in a static display is that it is fixed and it is narrative in that there is no call and response. The people viewing it are not asked for their opinion, nor is their opinion really wanted in it. It's purely there to lay out 'this is this object, collected by this person and this is its links to colonial oppression in East Africa and this is bad. Moving on.'. It's not asking people 'so what do you think of that?'. And if they say, sometimes it's best to have a contrary opinion because then you can actually have a dialogue. Now there's contrary opinions and there's *contrary* opinions. We're talking contrary opinions where 'I hadn't really thought about the British Empire but I grew up and read all these stories' oh great we can have a discussion, not 'I think we should bring the Empire back and this is a load of communist nonsense'. Probably not going to have a long conversation with you sir. A bit like the chap who genuinely tried to debate me into admitting that the pyramids were built by aliens and you sort of think ok, I'm going to extricate myself from this conversation very slowly. So yeah, I think that would be better and encouraging people to invest in it, to look at it. I think one of the weaknesses in the display is that it took pre-existing displays and really bolted *Curating Discomfort* on top of that. So, they were really writing around objects that were not necessarily suited to the point you were trying to make. So, you had

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objects from displays that, you had Scottish pewter and brass in there, which is very interesting but quite difficult to tie to. We have a objects in the collection that are absolutely a colonial legacy. There is no sort of margin to say 'maybe it was and maybe it [was not]'. No this was looted from an African village. And if you have that use that. Rather than trying to wrap your words around some 19<sup>th</sup> century collection of Scottish pewter, whip that out and put in some Pacific Island art that we're pretty sure was lifted. You know, there's so many objects in the collection. But I think that was something that the people who came up with *Curating Discomfort* didn't necessarily have editorial control over, I think they had to sort of work with what they had to a certain degree. I'm sure they would have wanted to do something a lot more wide ranging and dynamic but I think they sort of had to do with what they got and write around that. And as I say, if the community curators had complete liberty to write whatever they wanted, I guess they might have picked something else, I don't know what that sort of thing was. Many of the objects were already in those cases that they're writing on and you can't help but wonder is that what you would have picked or were you presented with a selection of objects and told you could write on one of these. It isn't really how it should go, especially if you're wanting people to write from their experience. You're again presenting a stranger with an object and being told research this and write on it.

16:50

Ethan Terry: So, I know there are certain, I think they're called community objects, are they the ones that have been selected by the community curators?

17:00

Visitor Experience team member: Yes, so in the case, you have 8 cases integrated into the thrust of the central box. They are all the extant pieces, they were all there already. On the side of the *Curating Discomfort*, on the orange boxes, you've got bolted onto that community curator objects. I think they were picked out especially to go into this display. So, you have a Tasmanian Devil, a native spear I think from the Pacific Islands, you've got a sextant, you've got an opium pipe. But all in all, you've got 9 objects that were actually taken out for this. And for something that they made such a big deal out of, 9 seems a touch low. And not necessarily 9 really cracking objects, 3 or 4 are really good but some of them you feel like are just there. The Tasmanian Devil is interesting but I'm sure you could find greater examples of colonial settler impact in Australia and Oceania. It's interesting but again but that's by the by, it's interesting and then we move on. It's either got to really shock somebody or be more impactful in that way. So yeah, but I'm not sure how much control they had. I'm sure there are objects in the collection

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that are bursting to get on display but are told no they can't go on for preservation reasons or security reasons or insurance reasons, who knows. There's a whole raft of reasons. I would be interested to see if they were given truly free rein what they would have picked.

18:41

Ethan Terry: Ok, unless you have any last sort of comments to make.

18:46

Visitor Experience team member: I think one of the problems with the approach, but also one that was intentional, was it was meant to be confrontational. They described it as an intervention not an exhibition, and I think that's at once its strength and its weakness in that, we talked before about ripping the plaster off on the conversation, I think it's absolutely achieved that. So, in many ways, the macro objective has been achieved. We are now discussing this in our exhibitions, we are making more effort. We got people involved and engaged with the museum who probably wouldn't have given us a second look before, maybe because they had preconceptions about us or the structures there that were inhibitive but were just not having those conversations. Equally, however, I think that confrontational approach is counterproductive if you're wanting to affect hearts and minds as it were. If you're actually wanting to bring people round to your way of thinking, especially if what you're talking about concerns very deeply held beliefs or sort of perceptions they have of their own identity, if you're trying to challenge that and change that and you're not being nice about it, quite often people put the shutters up and don't listen. You're not saying what I want to hear so I don't want to talk, I don't want to play with you anymore. And they say a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down and that's partly true, especially if you can give them something that is their culture. And I always got this, I go on about this all the time, the majority of people, even in Scotland in the British Empire, never seen the benefits of empire. But people often feel there's need to stand up for it, to defend it, 'I will defend your defending our street after so-and-so', 'why?', 'because it's our culture'. It's not, it's not. This man would have despised your ancestors and he'd despise you. So, we have this narrative. So, we appear to be doing things in the wrong way, in that we're challenging the people who, rather than, you should just reveal to them you've no need to defend this. It's not your culture, it's not anything to do with you. This is a cabal of extremely rich men who have done this. Yes, your ancestors got some jobs out of it but, I think, to say they were living fat off the wealth of empire. Well, my great granny didn't have shoes so you know something's a bit wrong here when we're looking at this gilded cask of, you know.

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There was a class element to it that I think that they're not approaching openly. And I'm not a Marxist, I should say that but in many ways I do think it would be interesting if we did get a couple of Marxist historians in just to have those competing viewpoints saying it's all about cultural identity, well it's all about class, it's all about economics. Because you have people who have an absolutist idea of what the problem is and probably it's never so neat as that. You never have as 'oh it's this thing', ah great we can all go home now, racism is solved, fantastic. It's never going to be that simple. So, you've got competing narratives and I think that one problem it had is that by being confrontational, for all that that got it through the door, it locked itself out of a broader dialogue with other people. And I think that going forward that should be something we maybe think to address and to stop inviting people who agree with them all the time. I know that sounds a bit silly but I think that one of the problems is that everyone who sort of talks about this and writes about this 'oh it's fantastic, fantastic' tends to be people who were always going to say they liked it anyway. And we don't need to start inviting the National Rally or whoever are around but consider people who maybe don't agree with this approach or who think there's more to it or more nuanced approach. I think that would be much more productive in actually advancing the agenda of actually making places more inclusive and actually addressing colonial and imperial structures that still persist but they often persist because they've not been a problem until now, at least for us that is to say. You haven't been forced to confront it whereas if you get people in who look at it as absolutely a problem. But equally, if we were to bring in an intervention based on class theory or communism theory, you'd probably say the divide here is class. So, I think there's a problem there. But I think that's something they're going to move forward and hopefully address in the future but I again you could do so much with any topic if you wanted to. So yes, that's my final thoughts.

23:02

Ethan Terry: Brilliant, right if we end it there.

Transcription end 23:06

## Appendix 10: Sample Curating Discomfort observation logs

I have provided three sample observation logs.

### Participant 2

Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2024

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- Low crowding
- Started at 10:30 in zone A
  - Took photographs of the Object Perspectives label and objects
  - Left zone at 10:32 - visitor spent two minutes in zone
- Deviated from *Curating Discomfort* route to look at displays on the right side of the central spine
- Started zone B at 10:34
  - Spent less than 1 minute glancing over the labels and looking at the Community Curator objects and objects relating to the Bishops and Clapperton
- Ignored zones C and D
- Went upstairs to the balcony at 10:36
- Came back downstairs and left the main hall at 11:06 - did not stop at zones E-G

### Participant 8

Saturday 22nd June 2024

- Low crowding
- Started at 13:16 in zone A
  - Watched the video for approximately 20 seconds
  - Visibly read the Object Perspectives labels
  - Looked over the panels
  - Left zone at 13:18 - spent 2 minutes in the zone
- Deviated from *Curating Discomfort* route and spent approximately 10 minutes in the exhibit space right of the central spine
- Went upstairs at 13:29
- Came back downstairs and left main hall at 13:42 - did not stop at any zones along the central spine

### Participant 13

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2024

- Low crowding
- Started at 10:39 in Zone A
  - Visibly read each label and panel sign
  - Took photo of Object Perspective coins
  - Took photo of Curating Discomfort panel & Declaration of Discomfort panel
  - Left zone at 10:43 - spent 4 minutes in the zone

- Deviated from *Curating Discomfort* route and went upstairs 10:45
- Came back downstairs at 10:55
- Started zones D at 10:55
  - Visibly read original labels and intervention labels
  - Glanced at community curator objects
- Started zone C at 10:56
  - Visibly read original labels and intervention labels
- Started zone B at 10:57
  - Visibly read original labels and intervention labels
  - Left right side of central spine at 10:58 and moved to the left side
- Started zone G at 10:59
  - Visibly read original labels and intervention labels
- Started zone F at 11:00
  - Visibly read original labels and intervention labels
  - Took photo of Alfred Leeds intervention label
- Started zone E at 11:01
  - Visibly read original labels and intervention labels
- Left zones at 11:02 and immediately left Main Hall

## Appendix 11: Curating Discomfort observation data

Data taken over two days (22-23<sup>rd</sup> June).

### Visitor paths

P1: A

P2: A-B

P3: B-C-D

P4: A-B-C-D

P5: A

P6: A-D

P7: G-A-G-F-E-B-C-D

P8: A

P9: E-F-G-A

P10: A

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P11: A

P12: D-C-B-A

P13: A-D-C-B-G-F-E

P14: A

P15: A-E-C

P16: A-D

P17: A

### Browsing visitors tally

Sunday 10:00-13:00 and 14:00-15:30

Zone A=22

Zone B=8

Zone C=22

Zone D=10

Zone E=18

Zone F=24

Zone G=22

### Visitor engagement tally

Number of full tours made by tracked visitors: 3 over two days

	Zone A	Zone B	Zone C	Zone D	Zone E	Zone F	Zone G	Total number of visitors observed
Total tracked stops	16	6	6	7	4	3	3	17
Total non-tracked stops	27	8	22	10	18	24	22	72

## Photos taken by visitors

All observations of photos being taken by visitors were made over the two days.

4 of Tasmanian devil and label (zone E)

3 of mind-map (zone A)

3 of object perspectives objects and label (zone A)

2 of Alfred Nicholson Leeds labels and objects (zone F)

2 of Declaration of Discomfort (zone A)

1 of Curating Discomfort panel (zone A)

1 of combined Community Curator objects and labels (zone G)

1 Hadley's Quadrant object (zone G)

## Appendix 12: Sample Glasgow - City of Empire observation logs

I have provided three sample observation logs.

### Participant 4

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2024

- Medium crowding
- Walked past zone K
- Entered exhibit space at 11:31
- Spent 2 minutes reading news clippings
- Glanced at zone F at 11:33
- Stopped at zone E at 11:33
- Looked over the objects for 1 minute
- Walked past zones G, D, C and H
- Stopped at zone B at 11:35
  - Began watching the Hayman video, which was already playing - watched this video to the end
  - Looked at the labels and objects for 1 minute
- Started zone I at 11:38
  - Pressed the screen to start the Hayman video and watched for 2 mins

- Other members of this visitor's group tried to call them away as they were leaving the exhibit, but this participant instead brought these other visitors over
- These other visitors did not watch the video and left the exhibit
- This participant left zone I at 11:40 approximately 20 seconds before the Hayman video ended
- Did not stop at zone J or A

## Participant 10

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2024

- Low crowding
- Started zone A at 13:53
  - This participant and their companion sat down to watch the Trophy Cupboard video - the video had already started and was approximately 10 minutes into the 12-minute runtime
  - While the final section of the video played, they took photo of the neighbouring Home Treasures display
  - These two let the video start from the beginning to watch all the way through
  - At 14:08 they finished the video and stood up
- Started zone B at 14:10
  - The two had discussions throughout as they read each of the labels
  - This participant's companion pointed out a section of the Colonial Miseducation label
  - They both took photos of the objects
  - Spent 4 minutes in this zone
- Started zone C at 14:14
  - Read label and took photo of the label
  - Spent 1 minute in this zone
- Started zone H at 14:16 Zone H
  - Read the labels
  - At 14:18 their companion rejoined them and they had a discussion
  - Left zone at 14:20 - spent 4 minutes in this zone
- Skipped zone D
- Stopped at zone G at 14:21
  - This participant took a picture of the other with the posters
  - They read and had a discussion for 5 minutes
- Stopped at zone E at 14:27

- They looked at the Rani of Jhansi sculpture and label for 2 minutes
- Stopped at zone F at 14:29
  - Read labels for door for 1 minute
  - Had discussion for 3 minutes
  - Skipped cotton samples labels/object
- Stopped at zone G again at 14:33
  - Read the news clippings for 1 minute
- Stopped at zone J at 14:36
  - Looked at objects for 1 minute
- Stopped at Zone I at 14:38 Zone I
  - Looked at objects for 1 minute
- Stopped at zone K at 14:39
  - Took photo of the Colonial Foundations label
  - Read label for 1 minute
- Left zones at 14:42 - exited by walking back past zones J, I and then A without stopping again

### Participant 16

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2024

- Very low crowding - this participant and their companion were the only two people in the exhibition as they entered
- Stopped at zone K at 13:15
  - Watched the video to the end (1 minute)
- Stopped at zone G at 13:17
  - Read the news clippings for 2 minutes
  - Their companion took a photo of the Mandela poster
- Skipped zone F
- Stopped at zone E at 13:19
  - They both read the Rani of Jhansi label
  - Their companion took a photo of the Rani of Jhansi sculpture
  - Spent 2 minutes in the zone
- Skipped zone D, C and B
- Stopped at zone H at 13:21
  - Visibly read the Cost of Abolition label for less than a minute
- Glanced at zone I objects at 13:21
- Did not stop at zones J or A
- Left zones at 13:22

## Appendix 13: Glasgow – City of Empire observation data

Data taken over two days (29-30<sup>th</sup> June).

### Visitor paths

P1: A-B-C-H-D-E-G-K

P2: J

P3: G-F-D-B

P4: G-F-E-B-I

P5: K-F-E-H-C-B

P6: H-G

P7: B-C-H-G-E-F-J-K

P8: K-J-I

P9: A

P10: A-B-C-H-G-E-F-J-I-K

P11: A-B-H-G-J-K

P12: B-C-G-K

P13: F-E-G-D-H

P14: B-F-G-K

P15: F-G

P16: K-G-E-H-I

P17: K-J-G-H-B

### Browsing visitors tally

Saturday 10:00-12:30, 14:00-15:00 and 15:30-16:00

Zone A=25

Zone B=21

Zone C=20

Zone D=6

Zone E=16

Zone F=18

Zone G=24

Zone H=12

Zone I=25

Zone J=17

Zone K=18

### Visitor engagement tally

Number of full tours made by tracked visitors: 7 over two days

	Zone A	Zone B	Zone C	Zone D	Zone E	Zone F	Zone G	Zone H	Zone I	Zone J	Zone K
Total tracked stops	5	10	5	3	7	8	13	8	4	7	8
Total non-tracked stops	25	21	20	6	16	18	24	12	25	17	18

### Video stops tally

Videos	Zone A video	Zone B video	Zone I video	Zone K video
Viewed to the end	8	2	15	13
Viewed in part	11	6	8	8
Total stops	19	8	23	21

### Photos taken by visitors

6 of Home Treasures display (zone A)

4 of Mandela poster (zone G)

3 of Colonial Exploitation of Nature animals and label (zone C)

2 of Trophy Cupboard video (zone A)

2 of Rani of Jhansi sculpture (zone E)

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- 2 of Door (object in zone F)
- 2 of BLM/Sheku Bayoh signs (zone G)
- 2 of Glasgow - City of Empire panel (zone I)
- 1 of objects (zone B)
- 1 of newspaper clippings (zone G)
- 1 of Loot and Glasgow Museums label (J)
- 1 of Colonial Foundations label (zone K)

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*Ethan Terry*

*06/11/2024*