



Supporting Anti-racism

Transcript - Melanie Keen, Director, Wellcome Collection

If institutions are truly to be anti-racist and anti-ableist, they have to carve it out as part of a really critical generation-long piece of work, because it's taken generations for us to get here with these embedded attitudes.

At Wellcome Collection we've just embarked on a peer-to-peer learning and un-learning program called the Social Justice Curriculum. It is unlike any other kind of anti-racism or anti-ableism training where you have to really allow yourself to be vulnerable, to feel exposed but also to be held, to do that in a space where you won't be judged, and all staff at Wellcome Collection are taking part in the Social Justice Curriculum.

I don't think that you can hold material like the material we hold at Wellcome Collection, and not do this work.

Museums, I guess, I would argue, are built on Western dominance and patriarchal attitudes which are inherently racist, which are about power and control and dominance. So, to be anti-racist is to acknowledge that power and control, to acknowledge that privilege, to recognise that the things which haven't come to light before have always been important to someone or to some communities.

From a personal perspective it's hard to do this work as a black person, working in a sector that is predominantly white, and I think that's why I talk about individual and personal responsibility for this work.

Whoever leads has to be bold, has to be courageous. I think the work of a leader is also to give your team permission: failing, making mistakes, in public, is part of getting the work done.

There are more schools of thought coming to the fore about what anti-racism is, and the role that blame or guilt might have to play in that. So, I think through doing this work we're finding out what our positions are, but also recognising what's unacceptable.

And it's a constant journey to interrogate your thoughts, to be conscious of what you're thinking, and not to think it belongs to somebody else, or that it's somebody else's responsibility.