

Supporting Anti-racism

Transcript – Nivek Amichund, Trustee, Museums Association

Hi, I'm Nivek Amichund, and I'm one of the trustees at the Museums Association.

So, in order for me to start to speak on this work it's important that I preface what I'm about to say with a disclaimer. Quite importantly everybody's on this journey at different points, and they're all equally valid. So, my brownness does not qualify me to speak on this above anybody else, I'm not an academic or a subject matter expert in this field. I don't have all of the answers to these things because they are infinitely intersectional. What's most important is that if I've got the opportunity to try to change something then I will try to change that, and hopefully that small change would create a chain reaction, and a ripple effect, and help influence further change across the sector.

Without accountability there isn't an understanding or acknowledgement of a rigged system and in order for us to enact change we need to first acknowledge what we think needs to change and what's happened in the past to prevent that change and what barriers do people from underrepresented groups face and how do we start to dismantle those. And it might not be an organisational change at first, but it starts with taking the first step and acknowledging what the issues are and that's incredibly important.

In cultural institutions we will seek edits to the status quo, and re-frame that as progress and give ourselves a pat on the back for doing some work and there's been lots of cultural institutions that have quite recently put out statements. Statements are one thing, but actions another. This is about permanence over performance, it's about asking why aren't there more people of colour in this country accessing the most senior positions in our cultural spaces.

Racism's reach is so pervasive that it means that we must take up the mantle of changing our workplaces and our social circles for ourselves at an individual level first not seeking to do the work when we know people are watching but doing the work because it's centring the people for whom the work's for.

And if you're speaking about any underrepresented group or advocating for any underrepresented group and that group's not around the table, you should be able to ask yourself when the time comes, and you're challenged to question your

decision-making. Because ultimately if there's nobody in that group or process that has any lived experience of what you're trying to change, or what you're advocating for, the likelihood is that your process is flawed to a level.

There's never going to be a right time to change and justice and equality never come in an easy, smooth transitional process. And let's not fall into the false dichotomy of we have to save money or we have to do things and provide structures that provide an equitable access to resources. That's a false dichotomy, they could work quite closely together, they're not mutually exclusive, and anybody else who tells you so, doesn't quite understand the work.

If we wait for unity we'll be waiting forever because there will always be people that will seek to divide and to pit us against one another because somebody else said something that's either contradictory or different. Those things are part of either a distraction, a delay or denial in doing the work, and the moment we can identify those things and call them out, we should, if we can.

Never underestimate how important it is to take up space. When I first started speaking out or speaking against systems that I felt were unfair, I started to notice a shift, that people who used to be more open in their language have started to clam up a bit and started to feel uncomfortable, but that doesn't mean that I should stop, that's not really my concern, how people act towards you are beyond your control. But it's important to know that you should only challenge when you feel safe to do so but if you can't - that's OK. The fact that you've taken some time to reflect on what you felt was not right means you've already started the process of trying to dismantle the language from the system from the structure which could start to implement change.

Not acting is accepting the status quo. And the moment you do that, you're accepting that a system based on privilege and supremacy, white supremacy, could and should exist and often there are people in the majority who benefit from that system. While simultaneously people who don't hold that privilege have a disadvantage. So it's not just about people having an equal right to sit at the table. It's about people feeling comfortable enough to speak at that table and be listened to at that table.