

Curating the Past

The Power of Archives in Shaping Black Narratives

16 February 2024, 15.00-17.00

Sala del Capitolo and via Zoom

Speakers

Professor Natasha A. Kelly (UDK, Berlin)

Lisa Anderson (Director of the Black Cultural Archives, UK)

Mitchell Esajas (Manager of the Black Archives project in Amsterdam)

Justin Randolph Thompson (Director of Black History Month Florence and The Recovery Plan)

Chair

Daphné Budasz (European University Institute)

Discussant

Khalil West (European University Institute)

Organiser

Mohamed Fartun (European University Institute)

Welcome address

Dieter Schlenker (Director, Historical Archives of the European Union)

Supported by the Department of History, the Historical Archives of the European Union and the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

Abstract:

In exploring the influential role of archives as a means of power, particularly in terms of visibility and valorization within historical narratives, our roundtable discussion delves into how archives can either elevate or marginalize voices and stories. This underscores the importance of curatorial decisions in shaping public understanding and recognition of diverse histories, thereby highlighting the power of archival work in making visible and valuing underrepresented narratives.

This is especially true for the narratives of Black Europe, where the curation and preservation of archives can significantly influence the representation and recognition of Black history and culture.

The roundtable will commence with an examination of the current landscape of Black archival practices. This involves a review of the methodologies, challenges and recent advancements in the field. By understanding the state of the art, we can appreciate the complexities and nuances involved in preserving and interpreting Black European history.

The discussion will then move on to the pivotal role that archives play in the construction of historical narratives. This segment of the roundtable will explore how archives serve as powerful tools not only in preserving history but also in shaping the public's understanding of the past. The focus will be on how archival material can illuminate underrepresented stories, particularly those of Black individuals and communities in Europe, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive and inclusive historical record.

This roundtable brings together leading archival institutions and scholars who have placed Black archives at the center of their work. The aim is to foster a dialogue between these two groups, highlighting the importance of their collaboration in enhancing the visibility and understanding of Black European history. By sharing insights and experiences, the roundtable seeks to bridge the gap between archival curation and academic research, underscoring the need for a synergistic approach in the study and preservation of Black heritage.

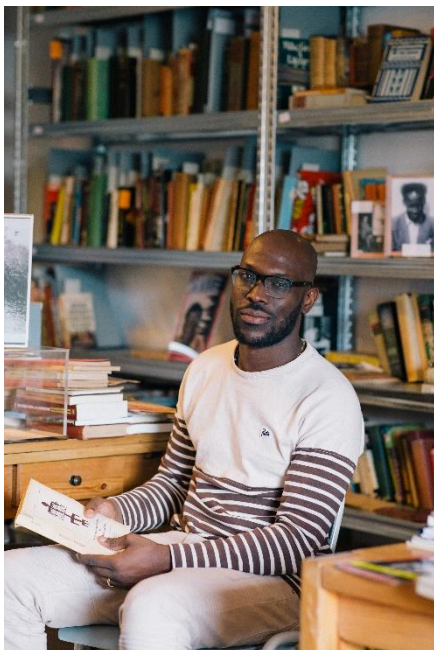
This event represents a significant step towards acknowledging and valorizing the diverse narratives of Black Europe. Through a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach, it aims to contribute to the academic discourse and enhance public understanding of Black European heritage, offering new perspectives on how we view and interpret the past.

SPEAKERS' BIOS



Natasha A. Kelly is Professor for Cultural Studies at the Berlin University of the Arts. She is a communication scientist and sociologist, author and editor, curator and multimedia artist with a focus on Black German History, Black Feminism and Afrofuturism. Kelly has taught and researched at numerous national and international universities; she was appointed Max Kade Visiting Professor for German Studies at the University of Rhodes Island (USA) in 2021 and Visiting Professor for Media Studies at the University of Tübingen (Germany) in 2022. Her artistic works have been shown at the

Berlin Biennale, the German Historical Museum Berlin and the Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin, among others. She is the artistic and scientific director of the first institute for Black German Arts and Culture in Germany, co-director of the Black European Academic Network (BEAN) and a founding member of the Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM).



Mitchell Esajas is co-founder of New Urban Collective, a network for students and young professionals from diverse backgrounds with a focus on the Surinamese, Caribbean and African diaspora. Esajas studied Business Studies and Anthropology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. In 2016 he co-founded The Black Archives in Amsterdam, a cultural center based on a unique collection of books, documents and artefacts documenting the histories of Surinamese and Black people in the Dutch context. The Black Archives develops exhibitions and public programs based on the collections and urgent

societal issues.



Lisa Anderson is an experienced arts and heritage leader, with a passion for visual arts and dance and a background in professional fundraising in the voluntary sector. She is committed to galvanising the power of culture and creativity for social justice and racial equity and has a Masters Degree in the theory and practice of human rights. Lisa is the Managing Director of Black Cultural Archives, a national heritage centre dedicated to the collection, preservation, and celebration of Black history for over 40 years.

She is also an independent curator, consultant, and champion for African Diaspora art, particularly in the UK. In 2015 she founded a curatorial platform @blackbritishart dedicated to celebrating and promoting the breadth of art practice by Black artists in Britain. In 2016 she was selected as one of ten participants to participate in the International Curator's Forum 'Beyond the Frame' curator development programme in association with the first ever Diaspora Pavilion for the 2017 Venice Biennale. She has presented papers at Bristol and Goldsmiths University on Black British Art and was the Arts Editor for Kol Social Magazine from 2019 – 2020. In 2019 she established Lisa Anderson Art Advisory to advise collectors with a special interest in Black British Art and she joined Black Cultural Archives as Interim Managing Director in 2021. She has curated shows for Latham and Watkins, Signature Art Gallery, and Black Shade Projects in association with 1:54 Marrakech 2020. The same year, she developed and taught a 4-part course on Black British Art history for Black Blossoms School of Art. She is on the advisory boards of Addis Fine Art and Uchenna Dance.



Justin Randolph Thompson is an artist, cultural facilitator and educator based between Italy and the USA. He is Co-Founder and Director of Black History Month Florence and The Recovery Plan. Thompson is a recipient of a 2022 Creative Capital Award, a 2020 Italian Council Research Fellowship, a Louis Comfort Tiffany Award, a Franklin Furnace Fund Award and a Visual Artist Grant from the Fundacion Marcelino Botin amongst others. His work and performances have been

exhibited widely in institutions including The Whitney Museum of American Art, the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia and The American Academy in Rome and are part of numerous collections including The Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Museo MADRE. His life and work seek to deepen the discussions around the arrogance of permanence and all that which evades the archive. Thompson's practice connects site responsivity and social engagement in ongoing forms of gathering, sharing and collectivity.