

barbican

**Everything you need
to know about
the Barbican**

stories

An indispensable record of discrimination in the workplace

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Written by people who have experienced racism
at the Barbican, funded by our white colleagues and friends

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Forewords

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Foreword 1

Barbican Stories is dedicated to those who have experienced racism, who are here, who were here and who will be here. This part is for you.

These stories were collected in 2020, a time when old traumas were being revived, and in a period where we did not have the space to come together, to share our stories and be heard. It was in this time that new traumas were perpetrated by the institution and absorbed by us. A year on, there has yet to be a serious acknowledgement of the systemic problem.

This project welcomed stories that, in the act of being shared with those who understand, brought catharsis. Our hope was that this act of sharing and storytelling would bring intentionally isolated experiences together and validate what many of us already know. Through this process, we've found an alternative way to do things on our terms and tapped into networks of power that exist amongst us. This is only one of the ways in which we have come together in solidarity, alongside the spaces where we have formally and informally collectivised. These encounters, and what emerged from them have powered this project. This is foremost a response of care when the institution made no space to care for us.

This book records. It is a vessel that ensures that these stories are written into history. It is a testament and radical archiving object because these experiences are swept under the ugly carpet of secrecy agreements in HR - which is what isolates our experiences and stops them from becoming a collective complaint. This book presents an alternative, but equally real narrative of what has happened and continues to happen not just at the Barbican, but everywhere, regardless of what the Barbican website says.

Hopefully this means we don't have to recount and justify our experiences again, and again, and again.

You do not need to read these stories because many of you will already know them intimately.

Thank you to those who have supported and contributed to the project. Recounting and articulating these experiences can be a difficult and often traumatic thing. We hope you have found some comfort, reprieve and solidarity in this collective action.

If you would like to connect, get in touch with us at **storiesbarbican@protonmail.com**.

Foreword 2

To those who have not experienced racism,

Throughout the last year, the Barbican has asked staff who experience racism to recount and justify what they have known to be true for their whole lives. The institution has asked for the exposition of trauma, in unsafe spaces. Stop. The existence of racism is not a question.

If you are or have been a Barbican employee, chances are that you have contributed to the perpetuation of this environment. So, let's begin by assuming we've all contributed to a culture where racism in all its forms (covert, overt, direct or indirect) is accepted and protected by the directors, HR, management and employees. If we do not accept this we will not move forward. These stories are a part of the Barbican, they are not blips in its history, but were poured into its concrete and are a part of the heritage that you need to address every single day you show up for work.

Pay close attention to the way you read these stories. How is your reaction informed by your position in society, your identity and your own lived experience?

Confronting white privilege must feel like LOSS - it's not about adapting to a new system - it is the redistribution of a power you were born into.

This could be losing a job,
It could be losing a friend,
It could be losing face,
It could be cutting a project that is your personal interest and not that of the wider audiences,
It would be changing the way you speak,
It could be changing the amount of time it takes to write an email,
It could be choosing to dedicate less money to transporting an object into the UK and more to hiring more Black and people of colour. Your budget is a moral document.
It would be choosing to look somewhere you're not familiar with for

candidates,
It could be unlearning your behaviour,
It could be publicly apologizing and acknowledging how you've behaved,
It could be coming to terms with your mediocrity,
It could be scrutinising the characteristics of your liberalism,
It could be not using your privilege in a crisis.

What needs to happen is nothing short of revolutionary - we need to look beyond safeguarding people in power to see what radical change really calls for (even if it feels uncomfortable or unfair).

We know some of you feel like you're doing your best.

What happens when your best is not good enough?

About the book

Barbican Stories is home to a collection of first hand and witnessed accounts of discrimination at the Barbican Centre, written anonymously by current and former employees who have experienced racism. These experiences are not unique to the Barbican, because systemic racism is endemic in the cultural sector and in society. Barbican Stories was funded by our white colleagues and friends.

This book exists to share collective insight into a hidden part of the Barbican's culture and to create a resource for all staff - both now and into the future.

This book exists to record and archive experiences that are typically suppressed, ignored and isolated from each other, often explained away as anomalies.

Writers are anonymous because it doesn't feel safe speaking up and characters in the stories are anonymised because this document is about looking at the Barbican through the lens of systemic and structural racism and discrimination.

Discrimination happens across multiple vectors at the Barbican: race, gender, class, sexuality, socio economic background, and disability. This book critiques the same system that lent zero support to its European employees when Brexit was voted for in 2016, the system that does not supply adequate support for someone coming back to work from maternity leave and the system that uses exploitative zero hour contracts to minimize their responsibility as employers.

The design of Barbican Stories is based on a pre-existing company sanctioned policy handbook that was written collaboratively by Barbican staff in 2016 called 'Everything you always wanted to know about the Barbican'. This handbook is given to all new employees upon joining the organisation and contains anecdotes to help them navigate the workplace. Though Barbican Stories is not company sanctioned, it has the potential to do the same thing.

This project began collecting stories in June 2020 and the book was published in June 2021.

Welcome to the Barbican

An icon of Brutalist architecture, the Barbican has always been controversial. Voted 'London's ugliest building' in 2003, people have been so distracted by its stony exterior that they made their verdict before they could even know what was going on inside (they might have cast their vote earlier if they knew!). Working with a site almost completely razed by the Blitz, the Barbican's architects, Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, seized the opportunity to propose a radical transformation of how we live, or at least to the middle class people who could afford a flat at the Barbican.

Some say that the result is one of London's most ambitious and unique architectural achievements: a city within a city! But this conclusion usually leaves out the Barbican's more important legacy: being the site of one of the UK's biggest industrial strikes. In fact, as well as being a marvel of architecture, the Barbican's history includes many histories of collective action by workers who have demanded more from the centre across its 60 year history. This is the only way that the most precarious workers at the Barbican have been able to access the rights freely handed out to other employees. Not bad for a building with so many leaks.

The Battle of the Barbican

The Barbican's radical histories begin when work started at the Barbican site in 1962. The site was so big that each part of the project was split into segments and each one was overseen by a different building company. The workforce that populated the site was incredibly diverse and notably full of migrants, featuring workers from Ireland, Jamaica, the West Indies, India and different countries in Eastern Europe.

By all accounts the health and safety measures on the site were poor (even by the already scary industry standards of the 60s and 70s). The demands for better working conditions ended up costing the City of London years of building delays but it also cost the lives of some of the workers as well as irreparable physical injuries to others. Guess all those names couldn't fit on a plaque as easily as Chamberlin, Powell and Bon.

In those days, minimum standards needed to be set by the workers hard and fast if they didn't want to be taken advantage of, which is in part why unions and union reps (called stewards) were so crucial to construction sites.

Let me paint you a picture of what you could expect working at the Barbican.

The Turriff site was among the first sites of action in what would be a long term struggle between workers and management. There were no toilets, just boxes full of chemicals for workers to use as makeshift latrines. The employers refused to build flushing toilets until at least two floors of the site had been built up and as a result, workers began walking to St.Paul's to use the public toilets en masse. It was not uncommon that the site was only half full, with all the workers walking to use the bathroom. It wouldn't be long before all working rights followed them right into the toilet. In 1976, John Laing (one of the construction firms working on the site) tried to force workers who were building the arts centre to work with cladding material that had been proven to carry asbestos. Talk about needing a risk assessment! In protest of this, 500 workers walked off the site in an all-out strike lasting two weeks.

These are the stories that end in positive change, there are others that had no resolution. Take the Barbican's iconic concrete texture for instance. Well, you can thank a group of half a dozen Black workers for doing that by hand using bush-hammers all across the Barbican site. This work was infamously horrible, extremely dirty and resulted in the majority of these workers suffering from 'white finger' also known as Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome, causing long term damage to the nerves in their arms, wrists, hands and fingertips. No amount of union action could ever fix that. The building looks a little more brutal once you know how it was made so beautiful.

As you can imagine, big bosses and architects were annoyed that unions might ask for bathrooms and even have an opinion on what material could be used to clad their buildings, so in 1965 they decided that they were done with it! First, they sacked 380 workers when some of them refused to show their union cards and then they tried to hire a few hundred other workers on the condition that they sign a document giving up their right to strike. Whilst hard to imagine now, this catalysed a huge collective push to oppose this

document, not just by workers at the Barbican but across London. That same week 2,000 workers from across London's biggest construction sites went on strike in solidarity with the Barbican workers. Pickets were formed on the Barbican sites and no new workers were let in. The construction company attempted to bring workers in on a bus, but it was stopped at the picket line by workers who smashed the coach to bits. As a result of this, and under mounting union pressure, the construction firm agreed to re-employ all previously sacked workers and scrapped the document.

By 1966 the architects were extremely behind on their architectural plans and kept issuing changes to the construction site, which in turn impacted the workers' ability to work effectively and more importantly, it impacted their ability to earn their bonus payments (which made up for their low wages). They would build a wall, only to be told days later that the architects didn't want the wall *THERE* they wanted it *HERE*. The Barbican's iconic concrete made this even more difficult as it meant that everything was more or less permanent (you'd think the architects would have stepped in freshly poured concrete at least once in their lives before, right? Once it dries, it's there forever). For the architects, the ends justified the means, especially when they weren't the ones that had to pick away at dried concrete for months.

Long story short, architectural delays combined with the issues over non-standardised bonus payments (which were partly based on how quickly workers could finish architectural plans, which of course is difficult to do if plans change every other day) led to a site-wide walk out on all sites controlled by the construction firm Myton. This was followed by a six week lock out, where Myton closed the site and halted work. This turned out to be somewhat of a blessing in disguise as it gave Myton a good opportunity to renegotiate bonus standards with the union, whilst they locked the site for six weeks to give the architects time to catch up on their work. Of course, no one got paid during this time. In this period Myton agreed to rehire all but the six stewards that had been most involved in the initial walk out. The workers said 'no' to returning to the site without the stewards. What was initially supposed to be an unpaid holiday for the workers became a year long battle between the workers, the construction companies and the City of London, halting the work for 14 months, making it one of the longest labour disputes in British history.

What's impressive about this is that the union bosses actually tried to re-open the sites but the workers' solidarity with the stewards was incredible. Myton tried desperately to sneak people onto the site in buses and with police escorts, but the workers stood their ground and scared them away. By 1967 the site was still closed and the stewards and strike committee called the picket line out after it became clear this would not be a win. The six stewards were permanently put on blacklists and struggled to find work across London after the strikes.

The architects never took any responsibility for the disputes and never once communicated with the workers. You'll find this seems to be recurring behaviour for the Barbican's so-called creative upper class.

This is the history that made the Barbican infamous, as one of the UK's premier sites of trade unionism. This site and the union negotiations initiated by the workers created some of Britain's most important trade unionists and shaped industrial relations in the 1970s, eventually resulting in revolutionary changes in the sector. You probably won't find that on the Barbican website.

Despite the delays, the Barbican Arts Centre finally opened in 1982 in an opening attended by the Queen and Margaret Thatcher - great! You'd think that after all that fuff with the workers that management might be more careful about outsourcing but unfortunately this is not the end of labour struggle at the Barbican. It seems that the people doing all the work on site are always overlooked.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!: Cleaners fight for equal pay at the Barbican

In 2013, the grassroots union Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB) began to campaign for a London Living Wage for cleaners at the Barbican, most of whom were migrants, who were earning £6.19 per hour at the time, what one might call poverty wages. Many workers at the Barbican, who were employed by the sub-contracted company Mitie, reported being

racially abused, insulted and threatened. By this point the City of London and all its official employees were proudly receiving a London Living Wage - not the cleaners though! They weren't *real* employees. On 21 March 2013 the cleaners went on strike, followed by a protest on 27 April and an occupation of the Barbican's Foyer on 4 May amongst other actions throughout the campaign.

In 2014 the City of London finally caved and said that whilst they *REALLY* wanted to give the cleaners a living wage, it was really *REALLY* difficult to negotiate with Mitie. They promised that once they started a new contract (with another, equally terrible) company, Servest, they would make sure to renegotiate their wages.

By the time 2015 rolled around, the wages were still the same and Mitie continued to refuse the Barbican cleaners a living wage. The cleaners began to organise again this time with IWGB's sister union United Voices of the World (UVW). At this time cleaners reported regular racial abuse from management and were only entitled to minimum legal sick pay (which means you get nothing the first three days off and then £96.35 per week, just enough to pay for your rent, your food, your transport and for any other needs you might have, including the needs of your partner, your parents or your kids! That's about £13.76 per day which won't get you much further than a lunch from Pret when you live in London.) The result of this was that workers were being faced with the Dickensian choice of staying home and falling into poverty or going to work sick. Not much of a choice when you want to survive.

In one instance a cleaner came to work on crutches as they could not afford to lose days and weeks of wages. The Barbican team responded by calling the police and forcing the worker to stop working by throwing them out of the arts centre. When UVW's campaign started, Mitie threatened to sack any cleaner that joined the protests. Amongst other actions, on 25 April 2015, UVW staged a protest in the centre and another one on 31 October 2015.

As a result of this three year struggle, in April of 2016, the cleaners finally won London Living Wage for all the Barbican cleaners, but also for all the cleaners

employed by the City of London. A full two years after this was confirmed for all other staff. That same year the new cleaning company, Servest, tried to sack all the UVW members who had campaigned for the London Living Wage.

This was one of UVW's first wins as a grassroots union and led to many similar campaigns across the country and other institutions in London. They became one of the first groups of unionised workers to ask for full sick pay, as well as being one of the few unions to represent the rights of migrant workers. Again, this perhaps is one of the Barbican's most unsung achievements, being a location for radical union organising!

Exhibit B: The Human Zoo

Whilst cleaners campaigned for rights that are given to most programmers, curators and directors of the Barbican, in 2014 the Barbican programmed Exhibit B, an exhibition looking to showcase the atrocities and racism experienced by enslaved black people in Europe and the UK in what the Barbican felt was a "serious and responsible manner". How? By re-staging Human Zoos of the 20th century and filling their spaces with black bodies in scenes of subjugation, where the actors stood in a gallery completely voiceless asking the viewers: remember how bad this was? The Barbican felt that it was an exhibition that highlighted the inequality and abuse that had happened (emphasis on the past with no opportunity to think about how this inequality might show up in the very building presenting this work). It was a performance originally conceived by white South African artist Brett Bailey, which had been displayed in a variety of museums and arts institutions before the Barbican. Bailey used the history and memories of pain, from communities that were not his own to create art that was meant to challenge the viewer, but at whose expense?

To no one's surprise (other than to the Barbican programmers and directors, apparently) this show triggered many visitors and workers. The result was a petition (which gained a total of 22,800 signatures) asking for the show to be cancelled and a protest of 200 people blocking the performance entrance on

the opening night. The show was cancelled. The petition and resistance to the show was led by Sara Myers, a journalist and activist from Birmingham who started the hashtag [#boycottthehumanzoo](#).

This was the Barbican's response:

"We find it profoundly troubling that such methods have been used to silence artists and performers and that audiences have been denied the opportunity to see this important work."

We hope that they feel similarly about this book by platforming it in their own bookshop! Lest we forget they were so passionate about staging work that critiqued racism in 2014.

2020: Again? Really?

Fast forward to 2020, which could really be a short history in and of itself, and we see the start of the global COVID-19 pandemic and then the murder of George Floyd in May, followed by the circus of performative "anti-racism" responses by the Barbican and the whole arts sector in general (we have included a timeline of events at the back of this book which can give you a play-by-play of the institutional chess game which has been trying to address systemic racism at the Barbican). Most memorably, in June 2020 "A statement from Sir Nicholas Kenyon, Managing Director of the Barbican" was posted on the Barbican website and it included the following line:

"The Black Lives Matter movement has demonstrated the urgent need for us to take action in showing an active commitment to eradicating racism in all its forms."

A tall order for an organisation built on discrimination!

In November 2020 it was announced that the Barbican Centre's front-of-house staff, who are on precarious zero hour contracts, would not be receiving a 20% furlough top up from the City of London, which they received

throughout the first wave of the pandemic. They were expected to get through a pandemic on 80% of the London Living Wage, which is not a living wage at all, especially when it doesn't include sick pay. This does not include staff who were missing in the rota during the re-opening period (due to sickness or otherwise), who will now have to reapply for their jobs. The administrative staff and creative upper class of the Barbican continue to receive 100% of their furlough and the benefits that come with being a contracted employee.

Front-of-house staff were the people who opened the centre when the country came out of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are the staff that make up the majority of the Barbican's non-white workers, many of whom are migrants. The fact that our lowest paid workers are migrants or marginalized people cannot be untangled from race, and definitely does not live up to the commitment of eradicating racism in even the most basic forms, let alone all of them.

In November, the GMB Union created a petition to ask that the Barbican Centre's front-of-house staff receive full top up - this petition has now been signed by 3,045 people. The Barbican's response has been to say that nothing can be done.

Management continue to wash their hands of responsibility and tell the workers that this has been a difficult time for **everybody**, whilst live streaming on Microsoft Teams from their fancy homes.

2021 and beyond

Following the announcement of the Government's roadmap, the doors open on 17 May 2021.

Almost all of the Barbican's casual staff don't show up for front-of-house shifts. They have moved out of London or found employment in places that value them more. The Barbican's creative upper class have to become hosts and invigilators to open the centre.

This book is published.

Barbican employees are shocked at the stories in the book. They can't believe that this is all true and so they dive into their minority workforce to find out for themselves, once and for all. Unconvinced and under mounting public pressure, the Barbican hires an external consultant (a friend of a director) to publish a public race report that concludes that whilst the Barbican could do better, there is no systemic issue.

2,000 workers across London's cultural sector create a picket line in solidarity with the Barbican workers, the ones in this book and the ones who never had the chance to tell their story. The demands of the protest are impossible and necessary.

During the Barbican's opening concert, as the conductor enters the stage to fill the auditorium with music, it is instead filled with the sound of 400 people standing up and leaving the orchestra on stage with no audience. A violinist cries.

All the employees of colour evacuate and the Barbican is left with a purely white workforce. There is a palpable sigh of collective relief "If there's no one but white people, then we can't be racist!"

Artists and estates stop aligning themselves with backward institutions so cultural producers at the Barbican have to become artists to fill the programme.

Whiteness clings to the walls like moisture. Visitors are too ashamed to cross the picket line.

Coffees go undrunk, **BRUTAL** tote bags collect cobwebs, the conservatory grows wild. The ducks leave the lake in solidarity. Old Barbican guides litter the Foyer. The orange carpet turns grey with dirt.

Eventually, audiences don't need a picket to stop them from coming to the centre. London's primed ready-to-pay cultural audiences now reflect the fastest growing demographic of people. These younger and more diverse

audiences that now make up the city's landscape find different and better cultural spaces that actually care about them and reflect their lives without skirting around the ugly facts. Why see another token diversity event when there are now whole institutions dedicated to the complexity of the diaspora?

One by one, lights are cut from the Barbican's many rooms and offices, as they grow dusty in the absence of people. Moss grows between the cracks in the concrete.

The only room that remains open is the directorate office.

The directors maintain a throne of old catalogues, leaflets and newspaper clippings, in a never ending meeting where the only thing on the agenda is to dust.

One unremarkable day, the Barbican ruins collapse in on themselves. The debris blows away to reveal an ON SALE sign.

The only thing worth anything at the Barbican is the land it used to occupy (and even that won't cover the debt left behind by the brutal beast).

Blitz Property Developers find EC2Y 8DS and they love a bargain.

Once again, the site is raised by the Blitz.

Barbican Stories

A Host of Colour

I stand here, ready
To direct you round the place.
You look me over - up, down -
Then seek another
For help.

Is it how I look?
Can you not trust that I know
Just as much as the white guy
You approach instead
For help?

He started last week
It's his second training shift
He's shadowing me to learn
The work
You don't want me for.

You didn't say it,
I know.
It's an un-nameable slight.
You probably don't even
Know you're doing it.

But I know, I feel,
The cut all the same.
It actually hurts deeper
For being un-named.

It's rare to find allies in a room at the Barbican. That's what it comes down to.

At the Basquiat exhibition, I greeted a customer who wanted to enter without a ticket. I said that she would need a ticket on entry, her guardian who then followed had said ticket and both of them entered the space.

The first customer was frustrated I didn't let her in without a ticket and as she passed me she called me a house nigger. I raised it with my manager who went up immediately and ushered her out.

People can explain away microaggressions.

Who can I talk to if I'm called a house nigger?

If I get three strikes, I'm fired, but what if a returning customer gets three strikes?

What happens then?

One day, a member of senior management came into the office to speak to a colleague. We all started talking about a conference and the different attendees. All of a sudden this person looked at me and said “You’re a yellow!” After an uncomfortable silence, they qualified this by defining yellow as the colour of my aura. The thing is, I’m Asian.

It has always been starkly apparent to me that the Barbican is a systemically racist institution and that has personal effects - walking into any art form office, meeting with colleagues who are employed on a permanent basis, the majority of audience we engage with, moving around the centre in general; it's obvious that to be white and upper/middle-class is an advantage here, not reflective of the London demographic (or global!!)

The best way I can describe it is it's like there's this low-level hum always in the background, a reminder that my presence here, in the role I'm in, is an anomaly. I feel like lots of staff, of all races, see and know this...but I'm not sure how many actually feel this other than other people of colour who work here. I always count the number of black and brown faces in a room; a habit of mine, so organic and automatic, I can't recall when that started.

I think working within an institution has a way of quelling feeling, slowing down and softening radical ideas for change with lengthy processes, endless meetings - a lot of bureaucracy. It becomes easy to 'leave certain conversations for now' or be satisfied with just 'trying' but not actually achieving. Barbican is beholden to, but also shelters beneath, the umbrella of the City of London Corporation - in the context of radical change, this binds any genuine desire from Barbican to make progress but is also used by Barbican as an excuse to delay progress. Any real, deep-rooted, positive change has to be supported by City of London and Barbican Directorate...and this is something I hope for but am pessimistic about. Not sure what the point is in offering ideas for change when I already know the answer.

I do seriously question my future working in an institution or the arts sector at all - is this really the place I can do most good? Is my presence here actually doing harm? Am I merely a token brown person to add to the 'diversity' myth of the centre? I am aware of the 'value' my brownness brings to the organisation in so much as it helps it appear diverse and inclusive. My brown skin is a commodity, in this context. To leave would present my department and the centre with an embarrassing predicament - one less brown person in the fold. Not good for appearances. This does not make me feel good, or powerful or confident.

I don't believe that anyone or any group is 'hard to reach' and I'm tired of that mentality serving to absolve arts and cultural institutions, including the Barbican, of any responsibility. How can these places with all their wealth, expertise, power and resources be unable to reach and engage with the same people that grassroots organisations can, with limited, precarious funding and resources? Something is amiss here and it's been allowed to slide by institutions, like the Barbican, accepting complacency.

I was three months into an internship at the Barbican, an organisation I had applied to continuously for two years. But I was finally there.

At an informal gathering I plucked up the courage to join a conversation some people I knew were having with one of the Directors. The Director introduced me to the group by the name of the only other person of my ethnicity at the organisation of a similar age to me.

I was mortified, and before I could stop myself snapped *“No, I’m the other one”* and hastily made my retreat.

I laughed about it afterwards, and friends laughed with me – at the Director’s cluelessness and at my sass.

But I never really shared with anyone how shaken I was – scared – that I’d somehow permanently destroyed my prospects of getting a job at the Barbican. That I fretted about it for weeks afterwards. That my natural reaction to someone’s micro-aggression had ruined my career. And that, in my mind at the time, it was all my fault.

To work in the arts in the UK as a person of colour is to feel toxic gratitude. To feel grateful to have won over three white people at an interview, to feel grateful to have overcome one’s lack of being immersed in the ‘right’ culture from a young age, to feel grateful just to be allowed into these hallowed white spaces.

That Director’s...mistake?...cost me weeks of stress and worry. If asked now, I don’t think they would genuinely be able to recall it happening. It was nothing to them.

A racist micro-aggression. A natural reaction. Weeks of stress. Years to reflect on my toxic gratitude. I’m not sure I’ve shed it yet. Not sure if I ever will.

One of the grime music nights at the Barbican Centre was cancelled. The insider info that led to this was that a 'tip off' from an estate resident led to police asking the centre to cancel because of 'concerns over knife crime'. I still haven't forgiven the centre for it, for cancelling the event over such a racist, elitist stereotype. That, and *Exhibit B*. When protests finally led to *Exhibit B* getting cancelled, the language in the press release was problematic to say the least: 'threats of violence from protesters' which was bullshit - it was all peaceful from start to finish.

This portrayal of POC and black people as violent and out of control is a classic way of othering.

I think the Barbican is the whitest space I have ever been in, and I have pretty much grown up in spaces dominated by white people.

I have had to explain to my manager why the Barbican's anti-racism response was bad and in fact, quite insulting to any and all non-white people at the Barbican.

I have had to deal with my colleague's guilty tears.

I have had to sit in situations where white male colleagues have told me how difficult it is for them to get a job now that no one "wants them anymore".

I had to read an email from an employee that arrived the week after George Floyd died, about the joys of digital detox.

I had to read an email sent by a manager saying that they wanted to let people of colour into the Barbican's programme ONLY IF, they had the experience necessary.

When a story of racism came up in my department, I had to deal with people sheepishly asking if the story was "about them" with little to no attention being paid to what the problem actually was.

I had to sit there and watch a senior staff member call my colleague's job a diversity position.

I went on holiday to a lovely sunny island. I came back to the office healthily tanned and one of the other producers, one of my peers in the office, came up to me absolutely shocked and said *"Black people get darker when they tan?!"*

I didn't know what to say! I was so puzzled by that moment!

A) How did she not know that?

B) How did she think that was a question that one can ask a black person?

C) How did she think it was appropriate to ask that in an open plan office?

To this day, every now and then, someone else who was there at the time will bring it up in conversation and we'd just absolutely crack up!

Later on, I'm thinking, this producer is someone who works with young people and people of colour and it really weards me out that she could have that thought process and that it was ok to ask in that context given the job she's in!

The first time the head of department said hello to me was in the second or third week of my traineeship. I was reading about Yinka Shonibare and she was walking past to go to the toilet or whatever and she stopped and was like “*oh, is that what you’re into?*” and I didn’t know what she meant by that and I was like “*Yeahhh?*”. She then introduced herself. It was very much in passing.

It was never about having a sit down conversation and I raised this a couple of times with my line manager. I said I wanted to sit down with the head of department, one to one, formally to have a conversation. In my entire time at the Barbican, this never happened.

The head of department never asked me or seemed interested in my role there. She never spoke to me about that unless she was heating up her food in the kitchen and I happened to be in the kitchen. She’d ask me what I’m working on at the moment and I’d tell her. That was it, nothing personal. It’s just dissonant to the way the traineeship is talked about - especially since the June uprisings - at high level arts sector meetings. Like they’re very happy to talk about the traineeship to anyone who will listen, but not to the trainee.

A young black girl around the age of 14-15 comes into the department to spend a week here doing work experience. I am asked to take her for lunch and share my experience of working in the arts with her. When we sit down to eat she asks me: *“Do you think I will be able to work in the arts as none of the staff here look like me?”* I feel mortified but also I see myself in her as I also have the same concerns for myself. I reassure her but deep down I am heartbroken. I did not expect to perform such emotional labour at work when I woke up that day. I don't tell anyone except my line manager who is also a person of colour. We are both so devastated.

I hate it when people say that the Barbican has a diverse programme and that they are GIVING People of Colour a voice. Which I have heard multiple times!

How entitled can you be?

You are not GIVING anyone a voice, if anything, you are taking advantage of an artist's voice and history for your own practice/profit!

It is transparent and we know exactly what you're doing, even if you don't.

People of colour HAVE voices, whether or not you choose to put them in your programme.

You should not be in your jobs if you do not know this.

I was a manager at the Barbican. My staff pass allowed me access to a number of different places, because at points I needed to be talking to security; I needed to be in Milton Court; I needed to be in a range of departments and that's what I loved about that job.

One day, my colleague and I are walking across to Milton Court to return some instruments. We buzz through the security doors, we say hello to the security people on the desk, we walk round the corner, the security person can still see us at this point, their door is wide open and right opposite their door is the instrument store.

We walk into the store, and out of nowhere I hear this guy, quite rudely, with a risen voice demand to know who I was and what I was doing there. Just me. No one else. This person was white, obviously.

I say *"I work at the Barbican, we've got a project here, we're just putting back some instruments."*

I felt disarmed though I knew exactly why he singled me out. I was the only Black person there.

I say *"What's going on? Why have you asked me this?"*

He replies *"We've had a lot of incidents of things going missing in the store."*

This whole time, my white colleague is standing right next to me. He steps in: *"What's going on? He works with us"*.

I show this man my pass.

There is no apology. He is visibly angry.

I go back into the office and write my line manager an email telling him what had happened, that I was very upset and wanted to talk. He said to come to his office. I burst out crying in his office. I was so upset that this had happened to me at work. I remember saying to my line manager *"What if that had been*

one of our students or one of the young people of colour on our programmes? That relationship would have been ruined forever! Done! End of story!"

I wanted something to be done; I didn't want the guy to be sacked, I wanted him to be formally spoken to. My line manager identified that the guy was part of the production team and spoke to the manager of this person. But there was no follow up, no formal talking to, just a casual "You can't do that" and then on it went.

In his feedback to me, my line manager said something along the lines of "We've spoken to him, he's really sorry, I hope that's ok." and it was left there. This comes across as "we've done everything we needed to do now so you should be cool with that."

As a manager myself, if someone had come to me in the state that I was in, I would have taken things a lot more seriously.

Visitor You may have not travelled yet, but hopefully you can get away from ripping tickets.

Me I love my job – I have successfully been on three trips this year, Hong Kong, Jamaica and India, because I work several jobs sir. Have a good day.

I built a programme to engage with 16 - 25 year olds, a great project that looked at the creative sector through a business lens. A large number of young people connected with the programme, many different organisations wanted to partner up, I remember Marketing and Comms being very supportive and keen to put the project out there.

I'd been around for a while and I knew that having the right person fronting the project would give it the best possible future. I knew that with the Barbican in particular, having me front it wasn't ideal in terms of a 'look'. So I made the decision that we would have a really intelligent creative practitioner who was white to front the project because that would make it easier for the powers that be to sign things off.

A new Director was appointed. She was tasked to make some money cuts and decided that the programme I'd built needed to go. There was kickback from various departments but in the end she made the executive decision that it needed to go. So it went.

Eventually I moved on from the Barbican. A few months after I left, the programme I built was brought back and led by the white creative as a freelancer. They literally handed over the keys to a programme that I spent years building. There was no explanation or follow up with me. The way this looks through the prism of race, is undeniable.

I appreciate that when you have a new director, things go in a new direction but I didn't understand why the programme was cut, then brought back and why it was given to a freelancer and to a freelancer who was white. There was no respect for the identity and intellectual property of the people who built the programme. The Barbican owns everything you think of and that's it.

I worked as an invigilator. Whenever there was race related conflict between myself and a white person (either on my team or a member of the public), I was always being asked “*Why did you react like this?*” rather than “*What caused you to react like this?*”. When I worked at the Barbican, I often felt little support or protection from my fellow colleagues.

The general makeup of the department I worked in was friendly but felt clique-y, culturally isolating, alienating and disempowering at times. As most of the staff are from white, middle-class backgrounds it was hard to have conversations and be included as I come from such a different cultural background. At times I was unable to engage in casual discussions and noticed that others, who were also from different backgrounds, were left out too. Additionally, most of the young people we worked with are from non-white backgrounds. I always felt cautious when young people were entering spaces that were heavily white and classed. The gaps felt massive and slightly exploitative at times.

When I covered the position for the temporary manager in my department, I had to be the one to ask about my additional remuneration rather than it be explicitly explained and given to me as a part of acting up. I would have liked to go for the manager post permanently but I felt as though I had not been listened to in my position at the time and I was also made to feel inadequate and unsure about my ability to step up to the greater responsibilities (despite having covered for the management position on two occasions).

A Black artist is commissioned to make work at the Barbican. They are commissioned to create original imagery for the marketing and press of their performance. The imagery they want to use, an image they have created themselves which depicts their own body, is flagged internally for 'implying violence' and deemed potentially unsuitable for a poster displayed in the Barbican's public spaces. In the past there have been posters at the Barbican displaying explicit violence, the only difference being that these images featured white bodies.

The question gets taken up very quickly to the artistic director who has the final say on whether the image should be used. A decision is made and the artist is censored.

The contact who is tasked to communicate this to the artist is the lowest ranking member of staff privy to this process of decision making.

No person of colour on staff is involved in this decision making process.

Visitors often ask me if they can speak to the manager. I respond by introducing myself as the manager. I have had variations of the same response to this: *"No, but really, where is the REAL manager?"*

Upon receiving the news of my new position I was absolutely elated, I believed so hard that I wouldn't get the job in the first place due to many things, my lack of confidence in the group interviews and the level to which I was educated (some of the candidates having already been to university).

I got the job, it meant so much to me having grown up around the Barbican, often visiting with school and my family. I felt I had been given the opportunity to be able to influence the offer for young people like myself.

On my first day, I walked into the office with my manager and slowly started to realise that of a team of about 25 there was only one black person in a permanent position who left before my time there was up and the other like myself was an apprentice on a fixed term contract.

Slowly over my time I saw big names roll through like Ballet Black, Toyin Ojih Odutola and even associate companies such as Boy Blue. However in many meetings I was still the only black face. As an apprentice it made me very uncomfortable seeing so few permanent staff of colour, it made me feel like there was little to no room for me to progress and continue working at the Barbican post my apprenticeship.

In my Director's meeting I was the only black person present. This experience stuck with me till today mainly because I knew it wasn't conscious yet so obvious. I sat in a room, of new staff being welcomed that day, realising all were white aside from myself. I hadn't noticed this at first, nor would I have cared because the Director's Welcome only has a few people attending and can't be representative of the Barbican as it happens with whoever has joined recently. However as the Director started his speech about diversity he made eye contact with me whenever he mentioned race or diversity and even started gesturing towards me in front of at least 10 other white staff members, in this moment I was so confused as the only example of diversity in the room I felt it was not something to be proud of or call attention to.

I left feeling like the token of diversity knowing full well I'd be on my way out in a couple months.

Walking into meetings and having people's jaws drop I started to ignore it. I want to commend my managers for really paying attention to how this made me feel and despite not being black have continued to advocate diversity in my old team.

A colleague recently sent around an email titled "re- Black Lives Matter..... So much needs to change..." In the email was a close up photograph of the Order of St Michael and St George medal. Depicted on the medal is an explicit scene of racial violence which the colleague describes in the email. This well meaning but highly insensitive correspondence was casually sent to the entire department, which is around 50 people. I think this action speaks volumes about the lack of empathy, the homogenous working culture and appalling lack of racial diversity across the Barbican's workforce.

That's not my name!

My name has been described as UNIQUE, ORIGINAL, UNUSUAL. These things can be both positive and negative depending on who says them and how.

Usually, I have experienced it to be positive at the Barbican but tinged with a slight sense of insecurity, verging on annoyance. Until very recently, I have always introduced myself in an anglicised voice, muting the accent in my name. But I've tried to stop because if I have made the effort to move a couple of continents, learn a second language and live in a country that threatens to pull the carpet from under migrants' feet at a moment's notice, they should at least try to pronounce my name right.

I always preface my name with an explanation and a slow pronunciation of it.

However, to this day people still get my name wrong. I have heard so many variations of my name and it is so deeply awkward to correct people because usually their embarrassment is too uncomfortable for me to bear, and it is something I always have to take on my own shoulders. I have to let them know that it's OK - YES my name IS hard to pronounce... something to affirm that they're not bad people! I honestly wouldn't mind if they got it wrong a couple of times, it is just the emotional dumping that comes with correcting them which makes it unbearable.

This is exactly how I feel when they ask how things are back home - how can I tell them things are not good? There is no space for me to tell them things are not ok in ways they will never understand, often this means I have to console them, tell them that despite everything I'm sure things will work out fine for my family.

This is a similar feeling to when they seem to assume I'm from any number of 'developing' countries. I hear all kinds of countries being mentioned next to my name by managers in large groups of people (many of whom I imagine also don't know where I'm from). I guess these countries are all the same or all too similar to them.

I think all of this speaks to a culture of whiteness in the office that goes unquestioned and it is these same people that seem to identify as progressive and have even called themselves allies. I just want people to be more aware and stop co-opting titles that are good for their careers, which they drop whenever they feel it is too cumbersome for them to take on the responsibility of actually being an ally.

Continuous no replies to email chains I am a part of and respond to (yet others in the thread are responded to and acknowledged).

I was helping out on the **Modern Couples** show in 2018. There was one tiny room dedicated to Henry Crowder and Nancy Cunard. Henry Crowder is the one black person that exists in the entire exhibition of 50 couples. It's the tiniest room, literally in an in-between space between two other big couples. The installation wasn't great, some of the wall texts were wonky, it just looked shabby. Then I looked at who Crowder was in a relationship with: Nancy Cunard, a white, well to do, aristocratic woman and I looked at the quote on the wall, and it wasn't even a quote by him, it was a quote by her saying that her relationship with him allows her to become a civil rights activist or something like that. Something about how she became interested in civil rights because of him. The curator could have really taken this as an opportunity to talk about civil rights in that era within the Harlem Renaissance but they chose to quote Cunard instead and continue to silence Crowder and use him as a prop.

Then I see that the courier is there and this courier is waiting for two copies of a book that she's brought along, to be put into the glass cabinet, to be sealed before she could leave. This huge book is called "The Negro" which was written by Nancy Cunard. The curators had planned to have one copy that will be shut, so visitors can see the cover, and one copy which is going to be open. And I asked the curator, "*do you know what page it is going to be open on? So that the person can leave?*" and the curator was like "*no we haven't picked a page yet.*" I don't understand how there can be a book with that title, the curator has gone through the effort of getting two copies so that one is open and one is shut, and they haven't even picked a page for it to be open in? And just the lack of care on so many levels and of not paying attention and blind to the narrative that they are foregrounding in a way that perpetuates the violence of it all.

The curator gave me the task of looking at the book and listing a few options of pages it could open out onto. The curator gave me her reference, a tiny book and the bits that she had highlighted told me that the way that Nancy Cunard thought about her relationship with Henry Crowder was exploitative. She just wanted a black boyfriend as a way to enter a space that wasn't for her. You could tell that by the way this academic had written this reference text - none of it was from the perspective of Crowder, it was a white woman

art historian writing about another white woman being read by another white woman and so the cycle of violence continues.

I picked a page with an essay titled something like “the white man’s problem”. And I said I thought it would be funny to have; the curator asked why. I said because it speaks to the fact that Nancy was using Henry. And she was like “no, that’s not the narrative that we want to give.”

I said to her, I think a lot of black people or people of colour who come and visit this exhibition when they finally arrive at this place, they’re like oh ok, there’s a person of colour, they are gonna wanna know what this person did or thought. So I was trying to bring some element of criticality and also trying to bring a voice from a black person into that space where only the white woman was given the microphone. And she said “no, I don’t think that would go down well.” She said “why don’t you open it on the first page?” Which is this tiny poem by Langston Hughes.... And she said “the poem by Lang-don Hughes.” Literally that poem is the most reproduced poem of Langston Hughes - how are we going to have this archival book and not use the fact that it has all these glorious pages of work by black people! (yes it was compiled by a white woman but it had all this work by black people in it) And the page that I ended up picking was a double page spread of all the different artists who were part of the Harlem Renaissance so it was literally just faces and faces and faces of black performers, academics, musicians... because at that point I was like, I think we just need more faces in here.... Just have more people in this one space you have given it.

At work, I have to get involved for Christmas celebrations, but there is no nod to Diwali, Eid, Vaisakhi. My colleagues know that I am not from a Christian background. Why is it that only Christian or Western holidays are acknowledged at the Barbican (especially when London is a hugely diverse city)?

I've worked here for over a decade. I have worked above and beyond to ensure that mistakes of the past do not reoccur – and my team has been recognised for the positive change and improved quality of audience experience.

But we are never offered overtime even though others in the organisation are - how could we reap rewards here too, rather than just rack up Time Off In Lieu?

There have been multiple occasions where colleagues that I work alongside don't take my input seriously. When things that I've foreseen and communicated are dismissed and things go wrong, my team always gets the blame even though I've raised it previously.

To stop this from happening, I ensure that everything I suggest is put down in writing so I can point towards that when my advice is not heard and things go wrong. I just wish I was taken seriously.

I worked as a Host and a Marketing intern.

There are things that I experienced at the Barbican that I put down to 'being on the bottom rung of an organisation'. In hindsight there were a lot of microaggressions, including racist microaggressions, I experienced from staff and audience members but didn't particularly know how to handle.

One of the worst times was when I was working at a London Symphony Orchestra event and an elderly white gentleman and his son came late to the performance. There was a strict latecomers point so I informed them they couldn't go in. At the top of his voice he shouted - "*She's on a power trip because she works here and she's nothing*". There wasn't any support from my managers for being treated like that.

In training for Fire & Health Safety, the trainer openly discussed how he would be biased towards a woman wearing a hijab if he saw her on public transport i.e. he would keep an eye on her and she would be a suspect for dangerous behaviour. At the start of the training, seemingly 'blooper' videos of health and safety accidents were considered good opening content for the session. People were encouraged to laugh at these and distance themselves. Often, these videos were of countries where health and safety isn't considered at all for labourers and these workers are not even offered full wages let alone consideration of their work environments. Often, these workers don't have a choice. None of these nuances were discussed or unpacked. It was just 'funny' content people should laugh along to and distance themselves from.

Contractor Gosh, you must be lucky to land this job, being governor.

Me Luck has nothing to do with it.

This story centres the stereotypical trope of the Angry Black Man. For context, there were two people of colour in my department of twenty five. We were both black.

I'm not one for meetings that don't have results. I want to be in a meeting where we talk about actions, not a meeting for meeting's sake. With hindsight and the experience I now have in senior roles at other organisations, I can see that there was a lack of professionalism in some of the running of meetings in my department at the Barbican. Often, I'd raise that and say, in quite a straightforward manner of speech: "I feel that this is wasting our time, we need to be talking about A, B and C".

The Head of Department told me that she wanted me to be better behaved in meetings. She repeatedly said that my persona could affect the room. She had also received comments from other colleagues which backed her up.

The Head of Department sent me to have coaching lessons on "how to communicate better and more positively in meetings". I was shocked by this.

The most positive thing that came out of this situation was that I suddenly had this coach who quickly became an ally. She quickly understood where I was coming from and helped me through some tricky situations. She started supporting me with replies to certain emails which I felt trapped by. For instance, the Head of Department might send me an email that was quite punchy or had an undertone to it that I didn't appreciate and this coach helped me with the writing of my replies. I'm now very good at writing difficult emails. Give me a problem to solve in an email and I'll do it in a heartbeat! But that whole having to go and be coached to learn how to be in a meeting was pretty tough and embarrassing at the time.

During my internship, I was mistaken for a cleaner - which wasn't too odd considering most of the Black members of the organisation were on the catering, cleaning or security team.

My chronic illness has been a pain management issue that only seems to have been taken seriously with my most recent line manager. Before then, there was lack of awareness or empathy on the matter. This pushed me to have other adrenal fatigue issues on top of the pain I was experiencing and makes me feel so guilty for not being enough.

Overheard at the Basquiat exhibition:

"Andy Warhol taught Basquiat right?!"

"If it wasn't for Andy Warhol, Basquiat wouldn't have reached the goal he reached right?"

I work part-time. My job was created when someone who was working full time across two artforms left and her full time job was split into two part-time jobs each belonging to one artform only. Though this role has existed for many years, I am told that my contract cannot be made permanent, only temporary, and that it is continually renewed over many years. I am told this is a historical anomaly and that I shouldn't take it personally.

I recently learnt that the other part-time job is on a permanent contract. I am a person of colour, the person in that role is not. An official, organised system has allowed this inequality to happen!

There used to be a racist and openly far right invigilator on staff. Everytime we were in the same space, he would eyeball me, always with some grudge. He would never swap shifts with me and was aggressive to me on our invigilator Facebook page.

Eventually he was asked to leave for his aggressive behaviour and attitudes. But I feel like I got sacked for less.

I've experienced racism from customers who I have then had to apologise to because my line manager has not believed my side of the story.

Am I supposed to just 'take it' because 'the customer's always right'?

The customer is not always right.

We should know right from wrong; we have to be our own moral arbiters and we need to take care of each other.

How do we make our white staff feel confident to approach situations where the customer is racist to our invigilators or hosts?

Top Boy was put on the list of Barbican anti-racism resources. The fact that the directors put that up and they thought it would be ok just shows me that they're not taking this anti-racism work seriously from the start.

We are just about to open the gallery for a Private View. No one is inside yet, just the Head of Department (HoD) and the Exhibition Curator.

I am an invigilator, standing in my position.

HoD Could you move THIS?

She indicates that I should clean something on the floor.

I smile.

Me When people ask me to do something they usually say please.

HoD Excuse me?

HoD walks away in a huff and later complains to the Gallery Manager, saying that "I should be reminded of who she is". The Gallery Manager then speaks to my line manager who then speaks to me.

I was standing right there! Why does there have to be a middle person to communicate something to me?

It's clear the HoD thinks of me as someone lower than her, as a person. A servant who can't be spoken to directly unless it's to give demands to.

Also, clearly there is a certain profile of a person in the Barbican that she associates with being a cleaner.

The official line I got at the end was "Be cautious when the Head of Department is around".

I've done three separate internships with the same team at the Barbican because they had 'no budget to hire me as an assistant' but wanted to keep working with me. Eventually, I was employed as an assistant in an adjacent team.

Recently, a white assistant was employed with no prior experience in the job. This made me feel weird, but I wasn't able to articulate why till now: it is important to use entry level employment as a development / training opportunity but I cannot help but wonder why it is that the opportunity is afforded to some and not to others?

I have a lot of experience and knowledge from my arts practice outside of work (which I have been working on for years and most of my colleagues are well aware of). This seems hugely relevant to the work we do in our department, and yet I am never asked about it.

A job position for my department is posted internally. Several of the department's more senior producers encourage me to apply. It is well known in the department that my manager has supported me in taking on tasks and responsibilities that fit with this role. After the deadline, I am called in to talk with the recruitment team. They tell me that although they think I am great, they believe I do not have enough experience.

In light of the poor job retention rates for staff of colour at the Barbican I felt as if I wasn't regarded as a trusted member despite having ticked so many boxes. In the arts, there is a common trend of hiring BIPOC in trainee positions yet not trusting or supporting them in their next steps. Unfortunately, this is how I left my internship feeling.

I feel helpless when a black invigilator tells me how rude and aggressive a visitor has been, only to realise that the visitor is a VIP sponsor to the exhibition at the time. Who can I report this to?

A long time ago, I worked as a retail apprentice with none of my expenses paid and shortly after that I was an underpaid Coordinator with responsibilities that far outweighed the title of my position. I lobbied for 3 years to get my title changed and was never retrospectively acknowledged or remunerated for all the work that I did.

I had been at the Barbican for a year and a half on a zero hour contract when I left to go abroad on a language course for 3 months. Before leaving, I asked my management what the process was for going back on the rota when I returned. They assured me I would just have to call the office to go back onto the rota and other Hosts informed me they had done the same. When I returned from my trip, I emailed the management team directly, called multiple times, went to the office in person and never received a reply. I was eventually told I would have to apply again through the website. So I did, and didn't even get to the interview stage.

Being the only person of colour on a big Zoom call is depressing.



When a colleague was offered a senior leadership role outside of the organisation, she was reminded that in her team, all the senior leaders were men and it was unlikely she would make any success in that department.

Although she shared these instances with HR, her peers and line manager, nothing changed quickly enough. Efforts were not made to openly educate these colleagues and address this behaviour. The status quo continued to be maintained... The Barbican puts on amazing work on stage, it has a vast amount of work to do backstage. It needs to start holding itself accountable; the senior leaders need to stop making excuses for each other.

There was an exhibition that had nude performers in it that was free to the public. The impact that invigilating this space would have on front of house staff was not accounted for before or during the run of the show and stands out as a massive failure to date as it significantly impacted the mental health of the entire team.

We had no training and no security to begin with, we were not equipped to care for the mental health of the nude performers and the effect that this experience would have on them. The performers would alert front of house during uncomfortable incidents with visitors who were not able to control their sexual urges in the space. It became clear that these types of voyeurs were part of a network and incidents would happen repeatedly over the course of the same day. The artist behind the orchestration of this event was protected from this information. On the flip side, I once had to console an audience member I was asking to leave. He broke down and was deeply upset that the way he was viewing seemed perverted.

If the Barbican knew I was a survivor of sexual abuse would there have been more care involved in preparing me and my team? Does it matter either way?

Contractor I need to get to the back office.
(often I'm not met with a hello)

Me Hi, could you kindly let me know what level the office you're looking for is on?

Contractor The one on this level.

Me Due to the building works, could you follow this route?

Contractor walks off on a huff, goes to the office to then realise it's not the one he wants, comes back to me at the front desk

Contractor (EXCLAIMS) You sent me to the wrong place, I need the office at the back.

Me You asked for the office on this level and that's where I directed you.

Contractor (SHOUTS) I NEED THE OFFICE AT THE BACK.
(this is said very slowly and broken as if I had a hearing problem)

Me I don't have a hearing problem, I understand English - and you will need to be escorted, if you could kindly wait here.

White male colleague appears

Contractor Hallo mate!

I sit down.

Throughout the pandemic and around the time of the BLM protests in 2020, one of the excuses we were given to explain why the organisation was not able to change as quickly as it needed to was that it was only able to incorporate change slowly. We were buried under bureaucratic emails and continually told to be patient. However, we saw how quickly we were able to adapt to the COVID situation and totally overhaul the way we work to accommodate the circumstances. This makes it seem that the Barbican is only agile and acts with urgency when it seems important enough to do so.

Throughout COVID the organisation also continually referred to the impacts of COVID as if they were the same for everyone. This really did not account for all the ways in which COVID hit some of the staff much harder than others, particularly those who have caring responsibilities, those who may be shielding and particularly those who were put on the front lines.

George Floyd's murder and what happened after was a traumatic period of time for the black community. The protests that followed the murder and all of the events around Black Lives Matter created a resurgence of urgency around racism and discrimination that Black people have had to live with their whole lives. The result of this time, for many, was a moment where people of colour thought they could share their experiences with racism and discrimination with those around them: family, friends and employers. Implicit in this was a hope that this time it would be different. This was an opportunity for white people and white allies to listen, to show empathy and to collectively work towards change. It could have been a moment where finally, change would be led not by those who have been struggling against oppression but by those who had the means to change things.

The Barbican did not take this opportunity.

Non-white staff tried to get involved in internal discussion on this and were quick to tell the Barbican where mistakes had been made. This could have been a time to let staff share their experience with their teams, the organisation and the directors. This was denied. At the same time, public statements on Black Lives Matter were hastily drafted without any involvement of Black employees. All this has done is wear away any trust that non-white staff had in the organisation, until it was ultimately broken. This has only gotten worse since.

When the Barbican chose to engage with their non-white staff, it was through an external consultant that led 'Listen and Learn' sessions two months later and it felt like they were outsourcing this 'problem' and responsibility. Why would we, as non-white staff, share our experiences if we did not feel that directorate was listening? They never interrogated their process or asked what changes they planned to make from the sharing of traumatic experience, with little care before or after. This makes any consultancy's job difficult - what can they do when all of their interviewees are entering 'Listen and Learn' sessions sceptically, with little trust in the organisation?

Part of the 'Equality and Inclusion plan' is to create a Taskforce but we have not been told who these people will be and how they will be turning our

experiences into action. If this is to be 'staff led' and the expectation is that staff (and particularly non-white staff) get involved, why does it feel like we are being asked to do what is fundamentally the Director's job? Even if at a point non-white staff felt that we were prepared to help, many of us now feel hesitant to open up as the trust and communication has been worn down by the institution's actions and defensive behaviour.

I enjoy my job and I love the Barbican as an arts organisation. As a new starter, I am shocked and disappointed to see how anti-racism is being dealt with in the organisation and I continue to be surprised by the lack of empathy and urgency around these issues. Other organisations have shown us that it is possible to be better and to take an approach to anti-racism that feels human, radical and open.

It is clear that you do not know how to deal with this. The only way to progress is by being open with us about this and engaging directly. Nothing will ever change if this labour is outsourced, we need to have difficult conversations, we need some conflict because nothing will change if we are not ready for difficult conversations.

Without any consultation with me, my job title suddenly changed from being a 'Manager' to an 'Assistant'. There was no one working directly above me, so why was the title changed to this?

It took me 1-2 years to change back and this affected the level of work I did when I took other opportunities elsewhere. It stunted my progression externally and there was no real reason why it changed or any significant consultation about how it would impact me.

There needs to be more diversity amongst curators at the Barbican. How can people speak for things they don't know about? You can't talk about it if you're not talking to a person from there, if that person is not in the room. A white curator can't speak on behalf of slavery or the struggles of black men and women in America. How do you know? How can you quote it if you don't know or not truly understand? Reading a book does not make you an expert on a black person's experience.

I had a meeting with the head of a separate programming department. He asked me what I was interested in, what my background and curatorial interests were. All the questions that the department I was doing my traineeship in was not asking me.

Over the course of my traineeship we met a couple more times and the second time that we met, he said he was planning for there to be a couple of exhibition spaces at the Barbican related to the work he was doing, and that he knew I would be interested in. He thought it would be cool if I curated one of them. He said he'd message my line manager about it. I thought there would be a conversation about my time and workload and that it would be worked out.

But the request was declined. After discussing the request with the head of the department I'm doing a traineeship for, my line manager said that as I am a trainee with this particular department, my time should be spent doing things in this department only. It didn't seem like an open conversation. It seemed like these were the orders from higher up and this is the response and now this is a dead end. No one had a direct conversation with me.

People were discussing what I could and could not do but I was not involved in those conversations! I felt like a middle party whose fate was being decided by other people who were not hearing my strengths, not hearing my skills and actively denying me opportunities in relation to those things!

Despite being the nearest staff member at the cloak room, visitors will go to another white colleague to check-in their bags and to ask for information, as they look more informed than me. This happens often.

My experience at the Barbican has been OK. I have come across staple institutional racism by the staff.

I've only seen one black person in a managerial role, this person has now left the Barbican. There is always a different attitude, a different surge to the way things are organised when it is a person of colour leading in the room. I do believe this person left on their own accord. But there are always reasons behind why people don't feel comfortable in a space.

I've only seen white apprentices or interns get jobs in the organisation after. People of colour who intern don't get taken on long term. That's a pattern of employment I've seen in the Barbican offices.

I am one of the few POC managers in my department. I get a lot of feedback of how other POC staff feel in the space and what it's like to work here: they are often patronised or belittled in the most insidious of ways.

Another POC trainee in the department and I were discussing our pay and how much of it goes on rent. We both come from lower income households, and as a result, support our parents with rent and bills. The other trainee's line manager overheard us and said that she doesn't believe that it is right for parents to make their children pay rent and bills and that it is cruel/unfair to do so, stating that her parents never did. That comment really upset me as I come from a single parent household and my mother is disabled. I responded that her comments were incredibly unfair and upsetting as not everyone comes from a home of financial security. My mother's need for financial help does not make her any less loving or caring.

It upset me further as, at the Barbican, there is a continual pattern of POC people being hired into precarious contracts and trainee positions. There is such a stark contrast in the daily realities between white staff, with permanent contracts, and the more precarious trainees they work with - which can cause micro-aggressions like the above that impact the working environment, making us feel alienated and ashamed.

We were at a meeting with a programming team and an artist's name which wasn't a 'traditional British / English' name was compared to sounding like an umbrella by a senior colleague and people laughed. This happened while people with non 'traditional British / English' names were present in the room. It was very hard to speak up in situations like this and often people would laugh along. I now realise that laughing along is something that the minority ends up having to do in order to fit in, in order to not be difficult or to prevent being seen as not a team player.

Often the programming team didn't make an effort to learn correct name pronunciations of performers and artists.

The way the institution made choices and the way that people behaved felt performative on so many levels, everything was just for the optics, everything was just about association and who you're seen to be with or around or who you're referencing or the canon of art history it is supposed to be part of or how woke you want to look.

I asked my colleague their opinion about something work-related, maybe because I have an accent they didn't understand what I said but instead of asking me to clarify they corrected me in a very patronising way and started to make fun of me, laughing in my face. They assumed I didn't know the difference between the words I was using just because English is not my first language, even though I have done my studies in the UK.

I took shifts 12 hours a day for 3 months during **Station to Station**. This was 60 hours a week. HR went to my manager to ask why my hours were longer.

My manager said: *"Because he's the one picking up the shifts!"*

I wasn't the only one doing such intense hours, but I was the only one who was asked to justify and show proof of my work.

When I mentored young people from behavioural units within my department, I wanted to create opportunities for them to be able to work at the Barbican. Some of the people that did work experience with us were really engaged with the role and able to undertake all of the responsibilities. It was always such a shame that we were told about these mentoring opportunities so last minute, as I would have liked to support more than I was able to. Why does work experience have to stop with the day? Successful people could be offered posts after some training.

My partner and I were having lunch together on Level G. We both work for the Barbican. I was sitting on a seat in the foyer and my partner, a woman, was standing up. A regular visitor comes over and says "Are you not gonna offer her a seat?" He made it clear he thought I was homeless.

When I got up and the visitor saw my Barbican pass, the visitor realised I worked there... he began to launch in about my manners. I believe he wouldn't have acted this way if a Karen was sitting on the chair with her laptop having a meeting about marketing. If I had sat there with my Waitrose bag and my Whitecross Street taco [*this is a street near the Barbican that hosts a food market on weekdays, this market is mostly frequented by the office workers who work in the City*], would he have said that to me?

In day to day operations, POC ambassadors are sent to community centres across our partner boroughs, and then when a relationship has been built, white colleagues take over and we are no longer allowed to retain contact. POC are used as pawns - "oh look at us, we're so inclusive". POC ambassadors are almost always denied progression in careers - even a sideways move is significantly more difficult.

I have seen many partners and siblings of other staff members join the Barbican workforce. My brother sent an application for a job in an adjacent department and though fully experienced, he was not even given an interview or a response, despite a little internal nudge from me.

There has been a steady increase of abusive behaviour from the public to our staff. Earlier in the pandemic, when galleries were open, I suggested that the centre signposted support for our casual staff to our audiences... something to say: *"Our staff are working hard to keep us all safe, thank you for your cooperation."* like they do on the Underground.

A Head of Department disagreed and said that managers and workers should be able manage this in the centre without this signposting. He had raised that this was discussed two years ago and was agreed not to be the "Barbican voice", to which I responded this is now in relation to Covid procedures. I made it clear that this was now necessary as abusive behaviour had heightened during the pandemic.

I was still met with a hard no.

This same suggestion was made by a white colleague a week later and was taken on board.

I was in an event meeting and asked if we could run through the plan for the event - this is done for every event meeting, especially if there are new members to the meeting or the project. I was told to be quiet and that I should have read the pre-meeting notes, I was then asked what the point of me being there was if I was not prepared. I said 'whatever' as a response and remained quiet. Then someone else in the meeting did exactly the same thing I had done, and it was not stopped, questioned or critiqued. My peers were uncomfortable but no one spoke up on how rude and unjust the colleague who had called me out had been. I complained and expected an apology. It was escalated and I did receive one from the person, but it took me to ask my line manager at the time for it to happen.

During members' tours of **Basquiat: Boom for Real** I noticed that when the tour guides went through artwork about police brutality, they would cut that bit short. Few of the tours were led by Black people.

This is a story about a staff member who I do not work with but share the same floor with. I can tell they are uncomfortable around me and on one occasion they followed me as I was putting my bike in the storage facilities provided before starting a shift which led to a very awkward exchange in the bike cupboard where he said, unprompted, *"I am not following you I just wanted to see what you are doing with your bike."* I decided to call their bluff and just tell them everything I knew in terms of tips about the bike cupboard. It diffused the situation. I didn't feel comfortable challenging them at the time as this person is constantly staring at me as if I am an extraterrestrial creature he has never seen before.

I worked with white colleagues in positions of power who were well-meaning, quite lovely, but at the end of the day very attached to their seats of power. They feel like they've worked very hard to get to where they are, don't want to relinquish anything, want to be on the right side of history and don't want to ruffle any feathers.

That speaks to the bureaucracy and structure of the Barbican itself. It doesn't offer space for staff who might have a problem with the way the organisation is running to even speak about it. You also have to be a certain type of person who is willing to take risks to have these conversations. Not everyone is that type of person. But there should be ways for people who aren't risk takers, who aren't loud, who aren't extroverted... it just shouldn't be a risk to speak up and reflect upon processes.

Once, whilst I was invigilating, a customer was getting too close to an artwork. I asked them to please keep a safe distance and they complained that I was 'manhandling' them. My managers checked CCTV, and saw that I never got close to the customer and didn't make any physical contact. The customer changed her story as the conversation developed and said that I was aggressive - potentially there were other invigilators who told her to do the same yet she remembered me out of them all or perhaps I was the one she couldn't tolerate.

Around the same time I started my job, something was stolen from my department. The manager at the time told me not to say anything, despite one of our colleagues having reported it directly to him that day. My manager told me that I was lucky to have my job and not to make too much noise about it. It was clear he was covering his own back. Down the line, this missing item became an issue for the department and it was me and my colleagues who were blamed for not doing our jobs adequately. The whole thing felt unfair and like we were the ones being scapegoated and blamed despite the fact that we had done everything in our power to do the right thing.

It's just short-term contract after short-term contract. I'm sick and tired of the fact that so many people of colour are always on these precarious contracts. It's unsustainable to be working in an environment where you are consistently working against the grain, constantly having to wave your own flag and also come up against the bullshit that exists within the system.

Colleagues at the Barbican liked to touch my hair. That's why I cut my hair short; it stops people touching my afro. There was a moment at my time at the Barbican where I thought "I can't have my hair long anymore, I need to cut it so I look more aggressive. That will stop people from touching it!". This is something I've continued to do.

I'm fed up with the way the Barbican have handled the situation. The Barbican has known for years they have a diversity issue. It's taken the death of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter for them to think "Oh gosh, let's do something". And then they go and hire someone to do the work for them. It would have taken the director 2 minutes to write an email to us! To say "hey, let's talk". It is so simple. I don't want someone else I don't know to ask me about my experiences.

Visitor Your family is fine with you working late?

Me (*pause*) Goodnight sir.

To serve the middle class or above, I feel like I have to behave like a slave to a master. I have to tiptoe on eggshells, because I feel like if I use my usual vocab and accent, I'll be told I'm aggressive.

There are many good people working at the Barbican and I believe I had many colleagues who were genuinely invested in my personal growth and I am thankful for their support. However, to be referred to as the 'diversity hire' is to have your worthiness questioned. I will never know what it is to exist in the arts without questioning whether I am here due to someone's diversity agenda. However, I do expect those who hire me and work alongside me to view me as they would a white person in a similar role. I hope speaking out doesn't harm my relationships and career, I am compelled to share these thoughts so the next black person (hopefully more than one!) who joins the Barbican might not share my experiences. I heard a senior staff member quoting the N-word - actually speaking the word - in the office. I have heard conversations which reinforce racist stereotypes. I have seen Barbican staff members turn up their noses at working class, ethnically diverse communities. I know my experiences with certain staff members have differed from my white colleagues, the need to prove myself is much higher. I am expected to be grateful for a temporary seat at the table - despite being part of the constant turnover of black and brown apprentices who are never offered a permanent contract.

The Director did a presentation in an all-staff meeting where he talked about the security and the cleaning team and was introducing different members of each team. On one particular slide, was a picture of a specific cleaner polishing a banister. This is a staff member he chose to introduce. For this story, we will use the name Rosa.

In his introduction, the Director said something like *"This is Rosa. We have [however many] metres of brass in the Barbican and Rosa loves cleaning the brass in the building"*. There was a palpable gasp in the room - we were SHOCKED! The tone he used suggested that cleaning the brass was one of the most important things for Rosa. It was RIDICULOUS. I was LIVID.

The white people in my team are frightened to talk about race. They can't say the word Black.

A representative from the Visual Arts team attended a Creative Careers session. An attendee said *"I want to be a curator but I can't afford to do a masters. How can I get into your job?"* And the Visual Arts person just sat there and, I paraphrase, was like *"you've got to do a masters, they're not going to even look at you if you don't have one."*

I have had countless experiences of being pulled into informal conversations with POC members of the team where I try my best to listen and support their requests and queries about the job, development opportunities and also incidents of systemic or interpersonal abuse. In confidence I have had to sit with this knowing they are keeping quiet to keep their job, but I have to respect their trust and safety over all.

Yellow Fever

When selling snacks
You don't expect
To be faced with
A lonely heart
Who "loves China"
And spends an hour
At your sales point
Telling you how
He thinks people like you
(You inwardly cringe)
Are so delicate
And exotic
How he's learning the language
Loves Chinese art
And Chinese women
Who are "so beautiful".

You smile politely
Do your job
(Or try to)
You say uncomfortably,
"Well, I've never
Been to China myself.
Not from China, me."
It doesn't stop him
He tells you more
About your culture
He pulls out certification
Of his government approved
Chinese language qualification
And weeps
Because he has never
Left his corner of England.

It's annoying that as a trainee you're embedded in these institutional politics. The people at the top don't have to pay attention to the politics of it all. It's not imperative for them to be aware of their position. They can get on with their life, they can get on with their day, they can have an entire career not addressing any type of structural discrimination. But when you're the only person of colour in the lowest paid position, you can't not look at your position in the whole scheme of things and think "this is okay" or think "I can get on by myself as a solitary individual thinking about my career." You automatically look for the potential to work horizontally, the need to speak to others; you're already putting yourself in a position where you're thinking laterally about power structures because you have to. And in no way is that perspective ever looked at as an asset.

Working at the Barbican inflamed my inferiority complex and imposter syndrome. People constantly made artform specific references as though they were common knowledge; like it was obvious that if you didn't know about something, you were not cut out for the work. It was my own personal work to reassure myself that I was coming from a different perspective and that's not wrong. A trainee who has to come in and bolster their own self esteem in such a way is a failure on the organisation's part.

There was a document about access and diversity and inclusion in the workplace circulated on email. I wondered what my department thought they were doing to improve access, diversity and inclusion because I know for a fact they are not doing anything. I scrolled down and literally all it said was "we have a traineeship." and at that moment I was like "Damn, this is how they see me." I did not know. I literally didn't know. It was rude and shocking. I was outraged.

There was nothing in the job description that led me to believe that this was a diversity placement. I think there was a line that said "we strongly encourage people from minority backgrounds to apply" but even that was only there because the previous trainee had suggested that it should be there. I don't think it was there when she had her job.

The problem is layered, and none of those layers are being looked at, or

addressed or named. At any level. And the fact that the head of department is waving the flag of the traineeship as being their saving grace is actually frankly offensive. It's like she's talking about me but not talking to me.

I dismissed the complaints from one of the invigilators about a colleague of theirs being racist. Later on supervisors confirmed that the colleague was indeed practising far right ideology. It left me feeling like I had failed big time.

I was shocked that there wasn't that much of an overlap between Creative Learning and the Visual Arts team. The Gallery team seemed to be very much in the mindset that the exhibition is what creates the art history and everything else is about community and access and that's not really their thing. It's not mandated that these conversations are had as part of the curatorial process from the very beginning. It's "Let's do what we want and any of the mistakes that we've made can be patched up by Creative Learning" or "We failed to engage this audience but they can do that, Creative Learning can bring people in and have that conversation." And even when those people come in and have those conversations, I don't think art gallery people even attend, they are not taking critical notes, there is no critical reflection of "We could have done this differently, we could have done this better." It's just separate, "we're going to keep going".

They're just going to steam-roll ahead doing what they've always done again and again and again.

I don't know if there's ever really been a process of learning.

A technician I was working with on a production asked me if another black colleague (who happened to have dreadlocks) could get him marijuana; not wanting to make the situation awkward I tried to avoid the subject. The technician then asked me if I could get him some marijuana.

At the **Basquiat: Boom for Real** private view, a VIP guest tried to cut the cloak room queue, I responded by telling him to join the back of the queue and told him that we would help him in due time. This visibly frustrated him. It was busy and a lot of people needed to check in their bags too. When he got to the front of the queue, he turned to me and said:

"If you have kids, I hope they drown."

I wasn't even the person who had initially taken his bag in or interacted with him but I was the only black person on cloakroom duties. The people that 'stand out' are the ones that are targeted.

In that moment, I was purely the target and evidently an outlet for his frustration and anger. He was still let into the exhibition of course as it was a private view and he was a VIP.

This kind of behaviour can come from people you think have the education to know otherwise.

I was told by someone senior to me that I shouldn't meet directly with my Head of Department, to protect me from their problematic views and for my own mental health. The advice was to wait until they got anti-racism training.

I was invited to a roundtable with and about women of colour working in the arts. They shared their experiences about working with institutions that were using them as diversity numbers for ACE applications whilst denying them any permanent role opportunity.

Not long after this meeting, a job became available at the Barbican and the institution decided to only accept internal applications.

That group of women were so right, they all have so much experience, they all could have been perfect for the role but were denied the opportunity to apply.

I don't know how many people within the Barbican could have applied for the role. The job description required 5 years of experience, the white person who got the job didn't have the 5 years experience, the POC women at the roundtable did.

When a woman in a very senior position announced her resignation, loud discussions were had about her age in a large open plan office and people 'jokingly' made guesses while also discussing her personal life. Senior male colleagues joined in and did nothing to stop the discussion or point out how ridiculous it was. This was insensitive; behaving like this undermined her position, reminded the junior female members that no matter how senior they got, men could still laugh about a woman's age and personal life.

During my time at the Barbican, one of my tasks was to research an artist we were going to be exhibiting and I saw very quickly that this artist was sus. The artist called herself a magpie, like a cultural magpie. I was like “baby that’s a vulture, it’s not a magpie.” I saw that she had previously done these really awful sculptures of black people and they were really grotesque in the way that she had represented them. Usually a lot of her figures are quite androgynous and quite culturally ambiguous whereas these ones were not. They had enlarged breasts, enlarged bums, stretched lips or ears, they were wearing gold chains which also seemed like shackles on them. It looked like some sort of modern day gollywog. The sculptures were sitting on the floor on persian rugs or something and alongside that were paintings of monkeys. I read the artists’ book on the exhibition and there was no mention of what and why this was the way it was. I spoke to our curator and this was when I was quite new and I didn’t know how to really navigate these types of things but also couldn’t bite my tongue. The curator said “yea, we’re not going to bring that up.”

A colleague went on holiday to an Asian country, an old British colony. When they returned, they said that the social uprising was not as bad as the press had portrayed but that the good side was that there were not too many Chinese people there.

I have always felt like a visitor to my department. I come from a completely different place in terms of my racial, national and cultural background and I am one of few that don't come from a place that upholds the processes and tastes of White British Middle and Upper class as the default. The only way I can see myself feeling more like I fit in is if the department diversifies its workforce, and our department transforms into one that is filled with different people coming from different places and that is centred in the work that we do. There is a dominant, unspoken culture.

These institutions are parasitic. They see young talent and they want to take what they can. They want to invite them to do a public programming thing. Them and their cool collective can bring their other cool peers to populate our space with cool black and brown people but then there's nothing further. What's the follow up?

In fear of protecting my job, I have given bad advice, not spoken up when I should have, or pushed for the truth... When you are made to feel like you cannot trust your own judgments because you are always corrected, edited or gaslit in some fashion, you lose your voice and your spirit.

Timeline

The institutional racism continuum.

The following is an incomplete timeline of events, which is meant to contextualize the making of this book.

Alongside this timeline, we could have a continuum of resistance and care, which is what has made this book possible but we cannot include it without honouring and naming individuals who have come together to care for each other throughout this process. Just know that it happened alongside what you are about to read.

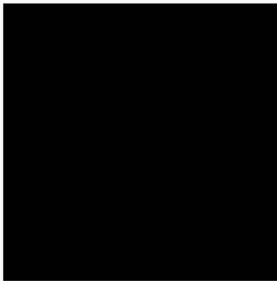
2020

25 May George Floyd is murdered by the police in the US

28 May The first Black Lives Matter UK protests in solidarity with George Floyd take place in London.

June Responding to urgency of the Black Lives Matter Movement, Barbican staff ask senior leadership how the organisation will address systemic racism both within and outside the organisation. The response is that the Barbican will not make any statements as it is an apolitical organisation.

2 June The Barbican [tweets](#) and posts not 1 but 3 black squares on [Instagram](#) to mark Black Out Tuesday.



barbicentre • Following

barbicentre We stand with black communities in opposing and fighting racism in all its forms

We stand with the staff, artists and communities we work with who face injustice every day

We know we need to do better and we're listening #BlackOutTuesday

30w

Could you please be more specific about your commitments? As a longtime supporter it's important to me that the institutions I love are "walking the walk". Many thanks.

Liked by [redacted] and 2,935 others
JUNE 2



barbicentre • Following

[redacted]

There comes a time where "knowing" you need to do better is simply not enough. Make the compulsory commitment to DO/BE better now. The time is now. It always has been.

46w 4 likes Reply

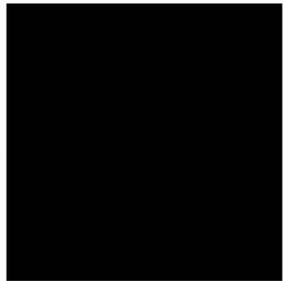
[redacted]

46w Reply

[redacted]

46w Reply

Liked by [redacted] and 2,767 others
JUNE 2, 2020



barbicentre • Following

Instead of posting the blackout three times, please can you post a statement of your actions going forward. You have a huge reach and could really incite change going forward. We are not interested in sensationalist SM posts without the specific actions you are going to take. I am long time supporter and member of the Barbican and hugely disappointed right now. Please stop ignoring the people in the comments who have brought this up. At least acknowledge their concerns.

45w 6 likes Reply

View replies (1)

Liked by [redacted] and 2,523 others
JUNE 2, 2020

12 June Without consulting any of their Black employees or employees of colour, the Barbican release '[A statement from Sir Nicholas Kenyon, Managing Director of the Barbican](#)' in response to Black Lives Matter. The statement outlines six "initial commitments in taking the first steps" to "eradicating racism in all its forms".

A task force is introduced, with no mention of how this would be put together and why.

June 2020

A statement from Sir Nicholas Kenyon, Managing Director of the Barbican

The Black Lives Matter movement has demonstrated the urgent need for us to take action in showing an active commitment to eradicating racism in all its forms.

As part of this, we need to acknowledge that we have not made as much progress as we should have on issues relating to race and to privilege. We're part of a systemic problem and we haven't done enough over time to address these issues in our organisation and in our sector. We're determined to change this now.

These are our initial commitments in taking the first steps to achieving this:

1. We commit to being transparent as to how we're delivering change. We will communicate openly how we're doing this
2. We commit to removing institutional barriers and increasing ethnic minority, and particularly black, representation across our workforce and further across our programme
3. We will equip ourselves with more knowledge; learning and growing together so that we can remove processes and barriers that sustain systemic racism
4. We stand for social justice, recognising the fight against inequality and racial injustice is an ongoing and everyday commitment
5. We will publish details of how we're making changes and holding ourselves accountable
6. We will create the space for us to have open conversations with our staff

These initial commitments are just the start, and we know we need to go further and to publish specific actions and deadlines for change. But real change needs to come from across our organisation and, importantly, needs to be informed by the experiences and views of all our staff, artists and those with whom we work.

We're therefore setting up a special taskforce to agree the steps we need to take to remove processes and barriers in the organisation that sustain systemic racism. This taskforce will involve people across the organisation and will be independently chaired by an external expert in this field who will help develop the brief and methodology.

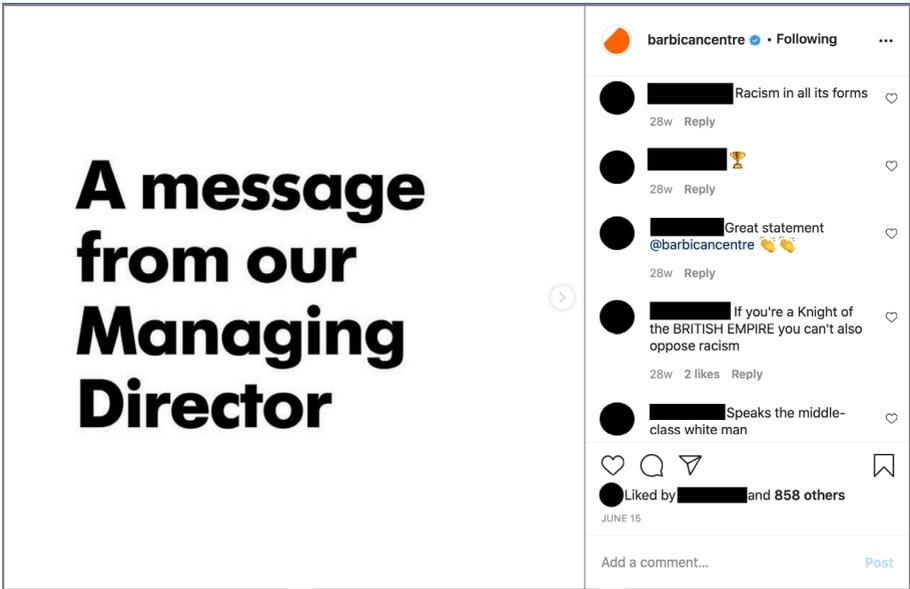
This will lead to an action plan, which will form part of our next Equality and Inclusion strategy and will be shared with all our staff and published on this website.

We'll add to this page with updates on this work, meeting our commitment both internally and externally to be transparent as to how we're removing institutional barriers and holding ourselves accountable.

We are changing.

Sir Nicholas Kenyon
Managing Director, Barbican

15 June The Barbican posts 'A statement from Sir Nicholas Kenyon, Managing Director of the Barbican' on social media



July Challenge Consultancy is engaged as an external evaluator for racism within the organisation, they are tasked with producing a report for the Barbican directors following a series of Listen and Learn sessions with staff. None of the Listen and Learn sessions involved directors who still have not directly spoken to their colleagues of colour. There is little to no care for people of colour who are repeatedly asked to show receipts of racism in front of others within 1.5 hour meetings.

The Barbican pays £15,600 for this report and when it comes out it is little more than headline. No budget is allocated to departments by directorate to carry out any anti-racism training.

Following the conversations and staff meetings that happen in this time, there is an understanding in the organisation that the upcoming vacancy of the role of Director of Arts and Learning may be used as an opportunity to bring someone to a senior position who does not come from the traditional background of senior leadership at the Barbican.

2 October A letter anonymously written to all staff by employees of colour is released on the intranet (the Barbican's staff social page) in regard to Challenge's process and the ongoing conversations about anti-racism. This follows a period where directorate have claimed that the anti-racism process has been a success and publicly thanked Challenge for their expertise. The letter is widely read by the workforce, the directors provide no direct response to this letter:

As colleagues of colour, we are a minority at the Barbican and cannot speak with everyone independently. We know many of our white colleagues are keen to be allies and are invested in this process. We hope that sharing our perspective and being transparent is a step towards connecting on these topics.

“Are you simply going to ask those who have been marginalised or subjugated to come inside of the institution and participate in the same process that led precisely to their marginalisation? Diversity and inclusion without substantive change, without radical change, accomplishes nothing.”

Angela Davis, scholar and activist

It has been four months since the anti-racism process kick-started at the Barbican. A lot has happened and not everyone in the organisation has been informed in the same way about these processes. Colleagues of colour have been particularly proactive in this process in a relatively invisible way, so we wanted to use this article to outline some of our experiences and discuss our vision of “eradicating racism in all its forms”. In doing this, we embrace the invitation to be bold and open about how we work.

To date, many colleagues of colour have found the official Barbican anti-racism process frustrating at best and painful at worst. Some pain has been caused by being asked repeatedly to present receipts of racism in front of various constellations of colleagues and professional strangers; some pain has been caused by engaging in processes that have not been facilitated with enough sensitivity or care; some pain has been caused by promises and actions that don't match up; some pain has been caused by being silenced...

It is important to acknowledge these different and complex experiences in order to make any kind of meaningful change. It is not enough to gloss over our past mistakes around race which have made the Barbican as systemically racist as the society it exists in.

Our intention with this text is to detail one of many perspectives on the process thus far. This perspective does not represent that of all staff of colour. We encourage those with different experiences to share them too.

The Barbican's Black Lives Matter Statement

The Barbican published its Black Lives Matter social media statements on 2 June 2020 and Nick Kenyon's anti racism statement on 12 June 2020. No Black employees or employees of colour were consulted about these statements at the time (or since).

At around the same time and in response to these public facing expressions of solidarity, many of us sent our managers and directorate lists of centre-wide strategies that could be worked on, adopted and actioned swiftly by the Barbican. These were based on our experience and expertise as Barbican employees of colour. We shared these lists upwards because we thought it would be the best chance for change. We shared these lists in June, weeks before Challenge was appointed in July.

It was around this time that a group of us started to connect with each other informally and speak about the process together. We asked to meet the directors about the statements and the Barbican's plan to act on their promises. On Challenge's advice, directors declined our invitation to meet. On Challenge's advice, the first town hall around anti-racism that was planned for all Barbican staff was also cancelled.

Challenge Consultancy

Challenge Consultancy was appointed in July. We were informed of this along with all other staff in an all staff email two months after George Floyd was murdered.

The anonymous survey that Challenge sent round beforehand had a 100 word limit on each answer which was not made explicit in the form, until we were

ready to submit and told that we had written too much. When asked how to best get around the word limit, Challenge said that we could raise additional points in the Listen & Learn session, where we wouldn't be anonymous. When asked why such a limit existed, Challenge simply replied that they did not have the capacity to read any more.

Listen and Learn sessions

The 'Listen and Learn' sessions that Challenge ran in late July and early August to 'inform' their report was the first time we were able to find out more about the process in place to address racism at the Barbican. The first two 'Listen and Learn' sessions that were run for staff of colour were found to be hugely problematic for a large proportion of the participants. There was one session run for casual staff which did not compensate these staff for their time.

It was the first time that many staff of colour had heard from the directorate at all and it was in the form of Challenge who were speaking to us on their behalf.

It felt to us as though Challenge were under prepared and defensive; the space they facilitated was unsafe and they struggled to create rapport.

We were essentially asked to surrender our experiences of racism at the Barbican in front of a group of strangers.

The sessions were voluntary but it felt like it was our small window of opportunity to have our voices heard.

When we asked about the plans in place to address racism at the Barbican and how our stories would be used, the facilitator told us repeatedly to stop asking questions. Challenge were reluctant for us to interrogate their track record, get any further details on the work they had done within other organisations and how it had been successful.

We learnt that Challenge are not concerned about whether or not people "get it" but rather that mechanisms and practical things are changed. We don't believe anything will change if simply the mechanisms are corrected and the

company culture remains the same. These must go hand in hand.

Challenge made clear that their brief was a diversity and inclusion brief, not an anti-racist brief.

It was clear to us that Challenge's methods were more "headline" rather than in-depth and we believe this is evident in their report.

Challenge said that they didn't need to hear our stories to write their report and that decades of experience at the BBC and other organisations (who aren't doing well with their anti-racism work let's be honest), allow them to go away and write their report without our voices.

We came out of those first 'Listen and Learn' sessions feeling dreadful, worrying whether anything we'd said would be identifiable and dreading the consequences.

We fed back to the directors immediately. We sent through suggestions of consultancies which could take on the work necessary at the Barbican, these included Sour Lemons (who the City of London are working with and which is run by an ex-Barbican employee) and The Other Box amongst others. We believed these people were better placed to take on the work of addressing the internalized systemic racism at the Barbican. Our feedback was received but it was decided that the process would continue as planned.

How were the Listen and Learn sessions for you?

Mini Town Hall meeting

The town hall meeting was set up with the intention to provide staff of colour another opportunity to share experiences of racism with the directorate and management staff. Once again, people of colour were encouraged to share receipts of racism to a Zoom full of management, this was the third time they were being asked to recount traumatic experiences without a safe space, terms of engagement or a plan of action.

The town hall and Listen and Learn sessions were framed in such a way that the onus to offer information and deeply personal insights, in a potentially

exposing way, rested more so on employees of colour. It didn't feel that there was an expectation for white employees to share reflections on how their actions/inaction as individuals may have contributed to the upholding of systemic racism within the institution. This is not to say there were no examples of white staff self-reflecting and being honest, but that in the presentation of the opportunities to discuss racism, there was a general imbalance in the expectation of who 'listens/receives' and who 'talks/gives'. During the town hall senior staff were asked to respond to the report in an effort to engage in dialogue, apart from two Head of Departments, one Senior Manager and one Senior Producer, they remained silent.

Task force and beyond

At every step, we have engaged with, fed back and explained missteps about the process with the directors whilst also mustering up the hope that it would change by continuing to participate in it. We were asked to do the work but we were never respected as the experts and this felt like outsourcing of labour and an unwillingness to confront things head on internally.

The Barbican as an organisation has not reached out to its staff of colour following any of the events in May and June, there has not been a space of care for this group of people. We feel that all staff communications have not addressed the pain that has gone into this process and are not transparent enough. They seem to focus on presenting just the 'positives' and giving the impression that the organisation has things under control. If there was a detailed acknowledgement of parts of the process that have not gone well, been messy, confusing, intimidating - it would be a much more effective way of keeping staff updated on the Barbican's anti-racism work. It is important to acknowledge that communication is part of the problem.

Here are some things that seem clear to us.

We need to:

- acknowledge that racism and discrimination along the vectors of class, gender, sexuality, nationality and ability affects us differently and affects us all.
- acknowledge that the expertise to tackle anti-racism is (and has always been) within the workforce and it is the responsibility of the entire

workforce to engage with it. It is not concentrated at the top of the hierarchy nor does it live solely with a consultancy. Radical training and guidance is urgently required across the organisation, especially for those at senior levels.

- work from the basis that the Barbican is a systemically racist organisation
- nurture a culture in which the Barbican's staff of colour can feel confident, safe and supported to speak up.
- find a new radical way of working which involves speaking more widely across the workforce and not just feeding information up. How can we all be empowered to move together towards change?

Before we proceed with the recommendations by Challenge and the Directorate, it is important to take this moment to evaluate as a workforce how the process has been and decide whether or not we want to continue with these next steps or collectively, at this junction, take another road.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

20 November The anti-racism task force is elected and announced. They begin to be the scapegoat in all comms around anti-racism and are tasked with fixing racism within the organisation. Directors do not work closely with them. They are given no tangible support, no reduction of usual day-to-day responsibilities and no additional pay for this work.

In the same month the City of London and the Barbican announce that zero hours front-of-house staff at the Barbican will not be receiving the extra 20% furlough top up to their salaries as they had in the first wave of the pandemic. The GMB release a [petition](#) (signed by 3,045 people) and the following statement:

From July this year the Barbican Centre enjoyed a successful phased re-opening, allowing thousands of Londoners to enjoy art, music, online events and cinema in a safe, healthy environment and soon we'll do it again. The frontline staff - gallery workers, audience experience, front of house and more - have the expertise to make this happen.

Unfortunately, in this second lockdown, the City of London have decided not to top up pay for non-contracted casual staff beyond the 80% granted through the government's Job Retention Scheme. Announced with less than a day to accept these terms, the City has thrown its lowest paid and most diverse group of workers, the people that the public sees on every visit, under a bus.

The City of London is committed to the London Living Wage. 80% of the London Living Wage is not a living wage.

Frontline staff deserve to be recognised, with 100% of their furlough being honoured as it is for all other employees of the Barbican & City of London.

Please sign our petition and join us as we call on the City of London to reverse this decision and offer all staff full pay.

December The Barbican publishes an update to their anti-racism statement on their [website](#).

Anti-racism

December 2020

Since publishing our commitment to anti-racism in June 2020, we have been working as an organisation to move forward with this work. We have worked with an external agency and are taking forward the recommendations and learnings from that process, and formed a special taskforce made up of eight members of staff from across the Barbican who are empowered to consult and collaborate with all staff to lead us in making change within the organisation.

Our Equality and Inclusion Strategy will be updated in 2021, in response to what we've learned in 2020 and to what emerges from the process that the group is undertaking.

We recognise that this is long term work; it's an extensive project, and there will be short, medium, and long-term objectives and outcomes. We have much further to go, but there is a new urgency to this work in the organisation and we remain dedicated to achieving the goals we have set ourselves to deliver meaningful and sustainable change. We will update with more detail on our progress throughout next year.

2021

18 March Following a period of work, there is an update from Reflect & Initiate Group, formerly known as the anti-racism taskforce. In it there is no mention about the hiring of the new Director of Arts and Learning, they have not been consulted on this.

Hello everyone,

We just wanted to give a bit of an update on where we currently are, as things have changed since we last spoke. We wanted this group to be able to initiate urgent change but this is taking too long. We want to let you know why, from our perspective.

Over the last few weeks we have had meetings with The Directors. We presented them with our initial plans for the shape we wanted this work to take. We also fed back to them on a number of points including:

- The need for them to fully lead anti-racism change and not use the existence of this group as cover for any slow progress from senior management and leadership.
- Improve comms to all staff about anti-racism work they are doing and the remit of this specific group as part of a wider eco-system of change and improvement.
- The issue around individual teams feeling that they can't progress with their own anti-racism initiatives because of the existence of this group.
- The uncertainty that a lack of brief has created in how this group can progress with plans we make.

The majority of our work to date has focused on developing an approach for our work using the key pillars. As we mentioned at our last meeting we want to be able to meet with colleagues across the organisation to build an informed set of initial recommendations.

Following the meetings with The Directors it became clear that:

- There is still a big lack of understanding at a senior level of how racism exists in the Barbican. We were asked to explain the nature and existence of systemic racism in the organisation, despite the public acknowledgement of the problem.
- Any contact with the wider staff body must be with messaging approved by The Managing Director.
- The Directors seemed resistant to the idea of the group working directly with the Board members of the Board ED&I subgroup, even though we understood from the beginning that this was something the group would be expected to do.
- There is currently no specific budget assigned to this work.
- The group should not be making recommendations for change.

This is all obviously incredibly frustrating for us, after putting in a huge amount of work that is often deeply personal and exhausting, to develop

a structure to the work and find a way forward. We don't believe the organisation has demonstrated the commitment that it is signed up to deliver.

We were led to believe that the lack of brief for our work was a positive. We could define our own parameters and actually affect change by having a direct relationship with key figures, colleagues and specifically the Board.

This new information contradicts that and throws our plans into the air. Our plan to directly interview colleagues to discuss anti-racism and deliver recommendations cannot move forward as planned and we are unclear what our position would be in any process of implementing anti-racism change at the Barbican.

We're now in a difficult position. We feel strongly that issues of racism at the Barbican need to be dealt with urgently but as we said, this is taking too long. We're being swept into processes that are taking us further away from the issues we're trying to address, the racism that is experienced on a daily basis by you, our colleagues and others who work with us.

We've asked for and had approved some external facilitation from an organisation called The Equality Group. They recently ran some training here and some members of our group were impressed at their ability to cut through the bluster and hold people to account.

We'll work with them over the next few weeks to facilitate some serious conversations with The Directors to work out a clear path for anti-racism change and to assess whether this group is best placed to achieve this. We also want them to facilitate a meeting between ourselves and the Board sub-group so that we can feedback our findings to date to them.

For many of us, we feel strongly that the organisation needs to educate itself and move more quickly. If this next step of facilitation doesn't change things then we are going to have to reconsider our own involvement in this group going forward, and seek other ways we can advocate for change.

We need everyone in the organisation who feels strongly about this to help keep this work on the agenda.

Thanks

Anti-Racism: Reflect & Initiate

19 March Barbican announces a new Director of Arts and Learning, most employees including the Reflect & Initiate Group find out the same day it is publicly announced.

 **Barbican Centre** 
@BarbicanCentre

Today we've announced our new Director of Arts and Learning, Will Gompertz bit.ly/3r4NC2a



11:42 AM · Mar 19, 2021 · Twitter Web App

11 Retweets 18 Quote Tweets 98 Likes

 [Redacted] Mar 19

Replying to @BarbicanCentre
Improve the bars by adding taps/pumps for draft beers. I am only being slightly facetious here cause there is no longer a decent pub right near the centre making the bars in it all the more important. Go look at the South Bank to see how your bars should look and operate.

 2   1 

 [Redacted] Mar 19

Oh, look at ways to add some shelter outside (awnings or some form of roofing over a seating area). It is essential to be able to go out given how dark it is inside (nothing you can really do about that!).

 1   

 [Show replies](#)

 [Redacted] Mar 19

Replying to @BarbicanCentre
Absolute yawn fest

   1 

finding out the barbican have hired a white man as their new director of arts and learning after the past year of empty promises in response to Black Lives Matter, and that they are now trying to explain away the recruitment process as if it makes the result any better.....



 thewhitepube • Follow ...

 thewhitepube "Pretends to be shocked" the Barbican have just hired BBC's art editor Will Gompertz as their new director of arts and learning 🤔 and we've just been shown this internal email in which the Barbican are sweating explaining the appointment to their staff. Well you can sweat while you explain it to the public as well 🤔

[ID: meme of guy with his hand to the side of his face and then over his mouth, badly hiding shock. The meme reads 'finding out the barbican have hired a white man as their new director of arts and learning after the past year of empty promises in response to Black Lives Matter, and that they are now trying to explain away the recruitment process as if it makes the result any better.....']

3,383 likes
MARCH 19

[Log in to like or comment.](#)

I want to take the opportunity to explain the recruitment process. Saxton Bampfyde who led the process are highly experienced recruitment experts who were proactive in attracting applications from the widest range of people and encouraged interest from women and Black, Asian and minority ethnic candidates who are currently under-represented at this level in our organisation. The commitment to diversity was made clear in the job description and in the search process, which was productive. The interviewing panel was led by Tom Sleigh, the Chairman of the Barbican Centre Board, and included Board members Stephen Bediako from the Board's Equality and Inclusion sub-group and Jenny Waldman of the Art Fund. After a thorough process, engaging with a wide range of applicants, the panel unanimously agreed this

 thewhitepube • Following ...

-  And let's keep a firm eye on the BBC too, to see who replaces him as Arts Editor...

5w 46 likes Reply

— View replies (1)
-  Highly experienced in white supremacy

5w 5 likes Reply
-  🤔🤔

5w 2 likes Reply
-  I've just had a look at the staff of the recruitment consultants - all white apart from their diversity advisor 🤔
-  The role combines two positions which were held by women prior. And the current director also worked at the BBC prior to the Barbican.

4w 2 likes Reply

— View replies (1)
-  The same organisation gave Brett Bailey's Exhibit b more leg room...surprise, surprise 🤔

5w 2 likes Reply
-  For a minute there I thought Saxton Bampfyde was the name of the actual recruiter. Posh white in the arts daahling name

April The GMB Union requests more information from the directors about the hiring of the Director of Arts and Learning. The response feels vague, inadequate and PR led. The union respond to this with the following:

Dear Barbican Board E&I Sub-group and Directorate,

Thank you for your reply to our open letter regarding the recruitment process of the new Director of Arts and Learning. Our members appreciate the opportunity for dialogue and look forward to creating more spaces for discussion between staff, the union and Barbican leadership. To this end, we would like to meet with Directors and the Board E&I Sub-group to discuss the concerns outlined in this letter. We request a meeting as soon as possible, with a follow up discussion to include Will Gompertz in June. We have grouped our response in accordance to the Barbican Anti-Racism statement.

1. We commit to being transparent as to how we're delivering change. We will communicate openly how we're doing this

It is helpful to have the process clarified, however, we do not believe that this is representative of transparency, particularly with regards to appointing a senior position at a public institution. Clarity of process was only offered after we submitted a letter to the hiring committee. Our members, who are passionate about achieving racial justice and equity across the Barbican workforce, advocate for transparency for entire recruitment processes.

The City of London Recruitment and Selection Policy (last modified in 2019) and the Senior Officer Recruitment Procedure (last updated in 2016) do not include information on unconscious bias or the equality duty of recruiters. We believe that the process described does not meet the standards or ambition of the Barbican Anti-Racism statement. The global Black Lives Matter movement foregrounds structural racism in all aspects of public institutions and recruitment procedures contribute to the structural inequities we find in organisations such as ours. The equality recruitment efforts you have described are limited, especially in comparison to the approaches of other institutions:

1. [Live Art Development Agency \(LADA\)](#) Recruitment of New Artistic Director
2. [Society of London Theatres \(SOLT\)](#) Inclusive Recruitment Policy
3. [Parents and Carers in Performing Arts \(PiPA\)](#) Best Practice Charter
4. [Inc Arts Unlock](#) Toolkit

We would like to request that recruitment policies are assessed for their equity impact.

As a public arts organisation striving to become anti-racist, we need to understand if our current policies are up-to-date with equality legislation but also whether or not they are forward thinking and make recruitment equitable. The Equality and Human Rights Commission suggests that it would be helpful to publish information about the equality dimensions of policies such as recruitment.[3] This would not only help us to understand the decisions you have taken but also contribute to fostering a strong relationship with all people working at the Barbican.

2. We commit to removing institutional barriers and increasing ethnic minority, and particularly Black, representation across our workforce and further across our programme

Over the past year, there have been many high level positions in the arts filled by BIPOC candidates. Here are a few examples:

1. [Freddie Opoku-Addale](#), Artistic Director and CEO of Dance Umbrella
2. [Gus Casely-Hayford](#), Inaugural Director of V&A East
3. [Architecture Foundation](#) four new Trustees (all BIPOC), incl. New Young Trustees, 4 out of 6 BIPOC
4. [Birmingham Museums Trust](#) Joint CEO appointment of Sara Wajid and Zak Mensah

The Directorate balance at the Barbican is no longer acceptable in a 21st-century based arts institution. Alongside the imbalance of Directorate, only 19.3% of the Senior Management Team are from an “ethnic minority” background, a stark 20.9% lower than the ethnicity make-up of London as

of the 2011 Census. Whilst the gender balance is nearly right, more positive action could have been applied with regards to all protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010. For example, the recruitment process could have included junior members of staff to comment and represent the diversity of our organisation. Instead, Board members and Heads of Department were consulted, further promoting the institutional barriers the Barbican has publicly committed to removing.

We would also like to know how and why the female to male ratio of applicants were reversed when candidates were shortlisted. If 62% of the applicants were female, what was the criteria that led to the decision of a shortlist where only 38% of candidates were female? Can you also tell us what kind of work has been done to attract disabled candidates? Was their adequate LGBTQ+ consultation, too?

Furthermore, during a City of London recruitment freeze, nearly all of the new hires (incl. maternity covers and new Board members) have been white males or females. When we have asked why, we are told that they were the best candidates for the job. This is structural racism. If we are to explain why, it indicates that Senior Management is not equipped with the knowledge and tools to “remove institutional barriers and increase ethnic minority, and particularly Black, representation across our workforce and further across our programme.”

White, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class males do not face any of the barriers to recruitment and career progression that people outside of these categories systematically face. This is why they appear, on paper and in interviews, to be the best person for the job - all doors have been opened for them. It is not a level playing field. The question must be about how we change our policies to recruit people from underrepresented groups and make it an equitable process.

It is even more disconcerting that [our website](#) has only updated one Strategic Lead position of three - the one held by a white male. The last four members listed on the Senior Management team are two women and two people of colour. They have been written in smaller font and at least two have the wrong job titles.

We do not believe that simply recruiting a BIPOC Director will solve the issue. It won't make the Barbican a more equitable and inviting place to work. We also need to focus on changing our policies and working culture.

3. We will equip ourselves with more knowledge; learning and growing together so that we can remove processes and barriers that sustain systemic racism

Whilst we appreciate that Directors and Senior Management have recently attended two workshops, we believe this does not indicate a sustained commitment to equip Barbican employees with more knowledge to remove processes and barriers that sustain structural racism. We would like to know the details of what you have learned in the past year and how you will enact change.

As you have acknowledged, the commitment to becoming an anti-racist organisation requires extra financial and employee resources. Budgets indicate our priorities. They are moral documents that show us what institutions value. We hope you acknowledge that the lack of financial and structural support for the Reflect & Initiate Group is demoralising. A great deal of unpaid work, during working hours and beyond, was contributed. Will there be a significant budget allotted to anti-racism work? Will the R&I group be compensated and given the budget they need?

The following are examples of organisations that have contributed a budget to anti-racism work:

1. [Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust](#), Statement on origins of wealth
2. [Bank of England](#) Statement in Relation to the Bank's Historical Links to the Slave Trade (They have also recently posted a job to recruit a P-T research to investigate the links to transatlantic slavery and propose exhibitions to tell this story at the Museum of the Bank of England)
3. [Lloyd's Bank](#) Seeks Archivist to Investigate Slave Trade Links
4. [City of London](#) Removes Slavery Statues

4. We stand for social justice, recognising the fight against inequality and racial injustice is an ongoing and everyday commitment

We are approaching a year since the Anti-Racism statement was published on our website. Immediately responding to the concerns of our members, the union has facilitated meetings to discuss anti-racism and get to know our casual workers. Many of our discussions were attended by members of Senior Management. These conversations have been valuable, and contribute to building a stronger Barbican community. We welcome more dialogue and would like to know:

- What do you consider to be properly convened and facilitated?
- When will the conversations take place?
- Can we be sure that the results feed into decision making at a senior level?
- How will we know our opinions and suggestions are being listened to?

5. We will publish details of how we're making changes and holding ourselves accountable

Thank you for outlining the steps for developing the new E&I Strategy, however, the pace at which this has developed has only further demoralised staff and gives the impression that the Barbican fails to take anti-racism seriously or lacks the organisational ability to create sustainable and meaningful change.

We would therefore like to know more about the consultation process. Who will be consulted? Many of our colleagues from all levels of the organisation are dedicated to equity and racial justice in the workplace and our programming. We believe that our input is invaluable to the development of the strategy and would like to be involved in the consultation process.

With regards to City E&I training, do you think this is sufficient to make equity and inclusion a sustainable and integrated part of our working culture? Is this aligned with contemporary best practice across the arts sector? We believe that our ongoing anti-racism work must include training and tools available and accessible to all staff, including casual workers.

Automated anonymised recruitment has been a concern for Barbican staff for many years. It is excellent to see this rolled out, however, as we understand this does not apply to more senior positions and we would like to know more about what the City and the Barbican will do to ensure that we are in line with contemporary best practice to remove the barriers of structural racism.

6. We will create the space for us to have open conversations with our staff

We look forward to getting to know the new Director of Arts & Learning. As you have pointed out, Will Gompertz is committed to anti-racism and has explored the work of underrepresented minorities at Tate and the BBC. Please could you provide examples? Moreover, how has he contributed to equity, inclusion and anti-racism in the workforce? It would be great to further understand how he will lead this agenda at the Barbican. Alongside our new Director of Arts and Learning, how will existing Directors commit to this work to achieve an approach that works across all departments? Whilst perhaps not the intention, it appears that efforts at cross-organisational working have only further siloed anti-racism work when collective and collaborative approach from the top is what is needed to tackle institutional racism.

With regards to staff involvement in the recruitment process, we understand that confidentiality is a concern, however, we believe that anonymised applicant statistics can be shared during the process. To this end, we would like to understand how applicant data will be collected and analysed in relation to our Equality and Inclusion Strategy.

As members of the Barbican Family, we respect confidentiality and are incredibly disheartened to hear that you could not trust a single member of junior staff. Our disillusionment in the Barbican Anti-Racism Statement, alongside Senior Management's lack of trust in their staff truly indicates that something is broken.

We are a dedicated and multi-talented staff body of cultural workers, artists and creatives that would like to work with Senior Management and the Board to lead the arts sector in equity and racial justice. The Barbican is in a unique position to lead the cultural economy of the City and contribute

to the wellbeing of all Londoners, we ask that you recognise the ambition of your staff and improve the ways that we work together. If we are to collectively own the future of this organisation, let us build trust and communicate with productive and meaningful dialogue, so that we can sincerely move forward as an organisation against structural racism.

Signed,

GMB Barbican Rep, GMB City of London Branch Equalities Officer

GMB Barbican Rep

GMB Barbican Health and Safety Rep

On behalf of GMB Barbican Members



The City of London
Corporation is the founder
and principle founder
of the Barbican Centre

**Written by people who have experienced
racism at the Barbican, funded by our white
colleagues and friends**