

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**Wayne Modest**, Director of Content at Wereldmuseum (Netherlands) and Professor of Material culture and Critical Heritage Studies at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam

### Limbo Time: Museums, Caribbean Temporalities, and the Wounds of History

During his talk, Wayne Modest draws on three distinct museological episodes in Jamaican history – the request for the loan (and later the return) of Taino objects to Jamaica from a British museum in the 1970s, the acquisition of a large collection of African Art objects by the National museum of Jamaica in the late 1960s, and the responses by some Jamaicans to the (Great) Jamaica exhibition of 1891 – to argue that thinking with and from the Caribbean may help museums address what he will describe as the *wounds of history*. Modest takes *wounding* here to mean both the physical and emotional injury caused by a traumatic event and the temporal fissure, the gap or break caused by this injury. Addressing the wounds of colonial history, he proposes, would require that museums reorient their approach to temporality, a reorientation that Modest calls *limbo time*, or the temporality of repair and return. Such a reorientation, he suggests, would require, first, that museums see colonial injury not as in the past but as part of the folding of time in which past injuries live on in the present; and second, that museums see the potentiality of objects to afford imaginative return, to recover the erasures, to bridge or suture the gaps and fissures that the violence of colonialism created.

Modest will locate his argument within a longer history of scholarly engagement, both from and about the Caribbean, with questions of time. He engages with scholarship on Caribbean temporalities in the wake of colonial violence, specifically Deborah Thomas's work on *prior-ness* and *simultaneity*, then on Caribbeanist work concerned directly with the notion of *limbo*, specifically that of Kamau Brathwaite and Wilson Harris. This reorientation is, however, not limited to the Caribbean but can help us deal with catastrophic pasts that live on continue to shape our present.

#### Bio

A cultural studies scholar by training, Modest works at the intersection of material culture, memory and heritage studies, with a strong focus on colonialism and its afterlives in Europe and the Caribbean. His most recent publications include the co-edited publications, *Matters of Belonging: Ethnographic Museums in A Changing Europe* (Sidestone Publications, 2019, together with Nick Thomas, et al), and *Victorian Jamaica* (Duke University Press, 2018, together with Tim Barringer). He is currently working on several publication projects including *Museum Temporalities* (with Peter Pels, forthcoming Routledge) and *Curating the Colonial* (with Chiara de Cesari, forthcoming Routledge). Modest has (co)curated several exhibitions, most recently, the Kingston Biennial (2022) entitled *Pressure* (together with David Scott and Nicole Smythe-Johnshon) and *What We Forget* (2019) with artists Alana Jelinek, Rajkamal Kahlon, Servet Kocyigit, and Randa Maroufi, an exhibition that challenged dominant, forgetful representations of Europe that erase the role of Europe's colonial past in shaping our contemporary world.

