

## DESIGN+ Disruptions, Realities, Futures

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### Speculative interiors for museum artefacts: The decontextualise to decolonise (D2D) project

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#### Abstract

Decolonisation in museums is an urgent and evolving discourse that challenges dominant historical narratives, interrogates Western authority over cultural artefacts, and seeks to restore voice and visibility to marginalised communities. In Britain, museums continue to hold vast collections acquired through imperial extraction. Their displays often obscure these colonial origins, reframing artefacts as universal heritage under a Eurocentric gaze. As Abungu (2019) notes, decolonisation requires structural change, rethinking display, interpretation, and who is authorised to tell these stories. Ahamed-Barke (2024) sharpens this provocation by claiming that “to decolonise is to decontextualise”. Decolonisation, then, extends beyond repatriation to disrupt museological frameworks themselves—unsettling hierarchies, reconfiguring spatial strategies, and imagining new relationships between artefacts, communities, and institutions. Within this dialogue, interior architecture and design education emerge as critical sites of intervention. Museums are constituted not only by their collections but by their spatial narratives; if space is socially produced (Lefebvre 1991), it can either reinforce colonial authority or open possibilities for plurality. The Decontextualise to Decolonise (D2D) project, developed at the University of Brighton in collaboration with Brighton & Hove Museums, tested these ideas pedagogically. Final-year students re-sited and re-presented artefacts from the museum’s collection through speculative design as a method of re-worlding (Dunne & Raby 2013). These proposals were not intended to be built but to provoke reflection and critical imagination, questioning existing spatial orders and envisioning alternative futures that challenge dominant epistemologies. The interventions acted as spatial and epistemic provocations, asking: If this artefact did not live in a glass case, where might it belong? What alternative rituals, landscapes, or communities could hold it? The project culminated in public outcomes: A QR-coded museum trail, a Lightning Talk series, and a curated book of student work. Student proposals foregrounded themes of reparation, reanimation, healing, access, and plurality, revealing a decolonial impulse to reimagine the museum as a living, contested space where cultural memory and authorship are renegotiated. Pedagogically, D2D positions students as co-authors and world-builders, demonstrating the potential of live institutional collaboration in design education. For museums, it redistributes curatorial authority, opening space for plural authorship. More broadly, D2D affirms interior architecture as a decolonial tool and proposes decontextualisation as a transferable methodology, applicable beyond museums to commercial, domestic, and civic contexts. Future research asks who holds the authority to re-situate displaced artefacts and how this power can be ethically shared between designers, institutions, and originating communities as part of an ongoing act of re-worlding.

**Keywords:** Decolonisation, interior architecture, interior design, museology, student partners

## Introduction

In recent years, the call to decolonise cultural institutions has intensified, sparking critical reflection on the role museums play in maintaining or dismantling colonial legacies. Central to this discourse is the recognition that museums have historically served as instruments of empire, accumulating, displaying, and narrating artefacts from the Global Majority through frameworks rooted in Western epistemology. Within British institutions, many artefacts remain expatriated, their presence a direct consequence of colonial extraction, imperial violence, and the ongoing erasure of indigenous and diasporic narratives (Ahamed-Barke 2024). The act of “decolonising the museum” must therefore move beyond the symbolic, extending into structural and spatial reconfigurations that unsettle dominant histories and restore cultural agency to historically marginalised communities.

Museums are not neutral containers; they are active producers of meaning. The spatial strategies they employ, how artefacts are framed, ordered, and encountered, play a critical role in shaping public knowledge and reinforcing hierarchies of cultural value. As such, spatial design is not a passive backdrop to curatorial intent but a powerful discursive tool. This paper explores how interior architecture can act as a transformative practice within the decolonial project, enabling new relationships between artefacts, space, and publics.

Focusing on the *Decontextualise to Decolonise* project, an educational partnership between the BA (Hons) Interior Architecture course at University of Brighton and Brighton & Hove Museums, this paper investigates how student-led spatial interventions can contribute to rethinking museum practices. Grounded in Ahamed-Barke’s provocation that “to decolonise is to decontextualise”, the project engages students as co-authors in the re-siting of artefacts through speculative, critical, and community-oriented design processes. These interventions explore how and where artefacts should be displayed and who has the right to narrate their meanings and futures.

In this context, design education becomes a site of critical pedagogy and public impact. Through interdisciplinary collaboration and lived positionality, students use spatial tools to challenge museological norms, engage diverse publics, and reimagine the role of cultural institutions. This paper argues that decolonial design practices, when embedded within real-world partnerships, have the potential to restructure not only what we know of the past, but how we imagine more just cultural futures.

This paper is situated within Aníbal Quijano’s (2000) concept of the *coloniality of power*, which exposes how modernity remains inseparable from coloniality: the enduring system of domination that orders the world through hierarchies of race, labour, and knowledge. Quijano argues that from the sixteenth century onwards, global power was structured “around the idea of race”, naturalising domination and legitimising the appropriation of knowledge and resources under a Eurocentric rationality (Quijano 2000, p. 534). Within this matrix, institutions such as museums operate as epistemic technologies that reproduce these hierarchies by defining what constitutes heritage and whose narratives are given legitimacy. Echoing this, Tuck and Yang (2012) caution that decolonisation must not become a metaphorical gesture within existing institutional logics but must instead entail material, epistemic, and spatial ruptures that unsettle colonial authority. Engaging these frameworks, the *Decontextualise to Decolonise* project positions interior architecture as a mode of decolonial intervention, reconfiguring spatial and epistemic relations through acts of re-siting, re-imagining, and re-narrating artefacts. In doing so, it enacts what Mignolo (2007) describes as a process of *delinking* from the colonial matrix of power, while attending to Tuck and Yang’s call to resist the institutional absorption of decolonisation as metaphor by foregrounding plurality, lived positionality, and the return of suppressed knowledges through spatial design.

This paper begins by examining the decolonial measures for reconfiguring museological authority, representation, and public engagement. Thereafter, the paper explores the application of these strategies through speculative design, positioning interior architecture as a critical mode of intervention. The following section presents *Decontextualise to Decolonise*, a pedagogic collaboration between the University of Brighton and Brighton & Hove Museums, as a pilot case study that operationalises decolonial design methods in reimagining museum objects in new spaces and uses. In conclusion, the paper reflects on the thematic responses generated by students, highlighting how their proposals offer alternative imaginaries for the liberated futures of displaced artefacts.

## Decolonising the museum

Decolonisation of museums is a global issue that requires urgent attention due to its profound implications for equity, representation, and international relations (Lee 2022). Museums, particularly in the global South, are deeply tied to colonial histories, having been introduced during colonial periods and benefitting from the exploitation of other regions through the forced acquisition of cultural heritage (Abungu 2019, p. 65). The theft and plunder of artefacts, human remains, and other heritage resources during colonisation have left lasting scars that continue to shape geopolitical relations between the global North and South (Abungu 2019, p. 66). These injustices are embedded in the narratives and collections of many museums, particularly in the West, which often perpetuate colonial stereotypes and discriminatory representations (Abungu 2019, p. 67). Addressing these issues is critical for fostering equitable international relations and ensuring that museums serve all communities fairly. Moreover, the current definition of museums fails to adequately recognise the diversities of human realities, including past and present experiences of discrimination and exploitation, making decolonisation imperative for creating inclusive and just museum practices (Abungu 2019, p. 71).

At Brighton & Hove Museums, decolonisation is understood as a continually unfolding institutional ethos that recognises the colonial entanglements of its collections, interpretive frameworks, and spatial histories. In recent years, the museum has articulated a commitment to acknowledging the ways in which it, like many cultural institutions, has upheld narratives of imperialism, racial hierarchy, and epistemic exclusion. Rather than merely revising surface-level representations, they have begun the deeper task of confronting their complicity in producing and maintaining structures of inequality and cultural erasure (Brighton & Hove Museums s.a.). This approach aligns closely with Abungu's (2019) assertion that decolonisation involves addressing historical injustices, dismantling colonial narratives, and actively creating inclusive, representative museum spaces. He notes that museums must recognise their positions as beneficiaries of colonial violence, particularly through the acquisition of artefacts via conquest, looting, and exploitation (Abungu 2019, p. 65). This requires a shift not only in institutional mindset but in governance structures, interpretive authority, and community relationships.

In response, Brighton & Hove Museums' *Culture Change* initiative seeks to embed these shifts across its organisational fabric. As Abungu (2019) outlines, community collaboration, inclusive governance, and ethical practices are essential to building trust and integrity in decolonial museum work. B&HM similarly states its intention to draw together "staff, buildings and collections, resources, communities and strategic partners to promote holistic organisational change" (Brighton & Hove Museums s.a.). This reflects Abungu's emphasis on inclusive curatorial practice and institutional accountability, especially in recognising the trauma of racism and the ongoing legacies of colonialism in public cultural space. The museum's current decolonial stance further embraces a methodology of contextual re-

examination. It seeks to reveal the origins and movements of its objects, foregrounding the conditions of their acquisition, the asymmetries of power embedded within their display, and the material and epistemic violence that often underpins their presence in a Western museum context (Brighton & Hove Museums s.a.). Education also becomes central: museums must inform visitors about the colonial histories embedded in their collections, fostering critical dialogue and social responsibility (Abungu 2019, p. 71).

From a spatial perspective, museums have long served as architectures of colonial order, designed to categorise, contain, and exhibit cultural artefacts in ways that uphold imperial hierarchies of knowledge and value. These institutional spaces are not neutral; they materialise forms of dominance that render colonised cultures as static, ahistorical, and 'other' (Lee 2022). Decolonisation cannot be achieved solely through reinterpreting artefacts within these inherited frames. From a museological standpoint, genuine contextualisation often lies beyond the walls of the museum, in the communities, lands, and epistemologies from which these objects were removed. To *decontextualise*, then, is also to *liberate*: to release objects from imposed narratives and restore their relational meaning (Ahamed-Barke 2024).

Yet this liberation is not straightforward, as the spaces into which these new narratives might unfold are frequently absent from existing institutional infrastructures. These absences, these voids of justice, memory, and context must be actively imagined and spatialised. It is here that speculative design offers a compelling methodology. Not only does it invite us to question what a decolonised museum could be, it enables the creation of alternative futures in which displaced objects and voices are no longer constrained by colonial architectures of representation, but re-situated in worlds that are yet to be built.

While this project critiques museological authority and reimagines spatial conventions of display, we must also face the deeper question: can museums, as historically colonial institutions of taxonomy and state power, ever be fully decolonised? Following Rassool's notion of counter-museology, the museum's classificatory logic and epistemic sovereignty remain deeply implicated in colonial matrixes of power (Rassool 2018). Modest's framing of a decolonial museum as a space of uncertainty and care suggests that decolonial work within museums is necessarily incomplete and must continually contest its own authority (Modest & Augustat 2023). Yet Azoulay pushes further: she insists that decolonising the museum demands decolonising the world, calling attention to the broader political and spatial orders that made museums possible (Azoulay 2019).

In this light, the spatial interventions proposed here may be understood not as final solutions, but as provisional gestures, ways to problematise and disrupt museum authority while acknowledging that some decolonial energies may need to move outward, into communities, policies, and infrastructures beyond the museum walls.

### Speculative design as decolonial practice?

Speculative design has emerged as a critical and imaginative methodology within the broader field of design studies, engaging with future-oriented thinking not to predict outcomes, but to interrogate present conditions and generate plural, alternative imaginaries (Mitrović *et al.* 2021, p. 69). Rejecting the logic of design-as-problem-solving or product development, speculative design seeks to unsettle normative assumptions, provoke discourse, and catalyse critical reflection on social, political, and environmental futures (Mitrović *et al.* 2021, p. 78). As Dunne and Raby (2013) articulate, it is not a predictive tool but a way of exploring possible futures by creating artefacts and scenarios that provoke reflection, raise questions, and stimulate debate.

In the context of the *Decontextualise to Decolonise* project, speculative design operates as a discursive strategy rather. Student interventions do not resolve the museological dilemma of artefactual displacement; instead, they function as provocations, culturally situated design gestures that expose the colonial underpinnings of museum space and open new epistemic pathways. These interventions resonate with Dunne and Raby's (2021, p. 47) assertion that speculative design enables a shift in the designer's role: from problem solver to cultural critic and facilitator of possible worlds. Here, the design act becomes a mode of critique, facilitating reflection on colonial logics of display and inviting alternative imaginaries in which artefacts are not vitrined relics but reintegrated into networks of ritual, community, and care.

Key characteristics of speculative design include its emphasis on critical thinking, imaginative projection, discursive engagement, and interdisciplinary practice (Butoliya 2020; Mitrović *et al.* 2021, pp. 69, 91). As an educational tool, it invites students to challenge hegemonic ideologies and explore counterfactual possibilities, be they speculative futures, alternative presents, or reclaimed pasts. It thus provides a powerful pedagogical framework for engaging with systemic inequities and the cultural politics of representation (Mitrović *et al.* 2021, pp. 69, 184).

While speculative design offers significant decolonial potential, its realisation depends on how it is practiced (Tonkinwise, cited in Mitrović *et al.* 2021, p. 173) contends that decoloniality in design is not inherent, but must be actively cultivated by challenging Eurocentric and capitalist paradigms, amplifying marginalised voices, and foregrounding local epistemologies. As such, decolonial speculative design is characterised by hyper-contextuality, participatory authorship, and an ethic of situated, relational practice (Mitrović *et al.* 2021, pp. 81, 153).

Its capacity to critique dominant narratives, decentralise design authority, and amplify culturally specific knowledge renders speculative design a potentially transformative methodology (Mitrović *et al.* 2021, p. 78). In this light, decontextualisation invokes the notion of counterspaces. Counterspaces provide the infrastructure for marginalised individuals to step out of their private worlds, interact with others, and engage in collective discussions about injustices and possible alternatives to the dominant societal norms (Nicholls & Uitermark 2018, p.250). Inverting the characteristics of Lefebvre's (1991) "abstract space", which privileges commodification and control, these counterspaces prioritise use over exchange, encounter over spectacle, and community over hierarchy. As Nicolosi (2020) notes, such spaces are marked by radical self-expression, alternative economies (bartering, gifting, upcycling), environmental interdependence, and experimental social forms. While they embody emancipatory potential, Nicolosi (2020) also warns of internal contradictions, such as the reproduction of hierarchy or exclusion. In this framing, speculative design becomes a site of situated resistance, wherein decolonial thought is materialised through spatial storytelling and counter-spatial imaginaries.

### Decontextualise to decolonise: A pedagogic collaboration

The *Decontextualise to Decolonise* project emerges as a pedagogic intervention situated within the final year of the BA (Hons) Interior Architecture course at the University of Brighton, delivered in collaboration with Brighton & Hove Museums. Rooted in the critical provocation that "to decolonise is to decontextualise" (Ahamed-Barke 2024), the project challenged students to re-site and re-present artefacts from the museum's collection as acts of spatial and epistemic resistance. The brief directed students to speculate on liberated futures for displaced cultural objects, interrogating not only where these artefacts might exist outside the colonial confines of the museum, but also how they may be animated anew, for whom, and within what spatial conditions.

The selection of artefacts and sites for *Decontextualise to Decolonise* was guided by both pedagogic intent and institutional context. As a live collaboration with Brighton & Hove Museums, the project sought to situate learning within real-world, local, and global frameworks, inviting students to engage critically with material heritage held in their own city while reflecting on its global entanglements. Artefacts were drawn from the museum's publicly accessible collections, representing a range of objects whose provenance, display, or interpretation revealed colonial or ethnographic histories. Students were invited to select objects that resonated with their own critical and cultural interests, fostering a sense of positional authorship and ethical responsibility in how they worked with these materials. The museum's five sites across Brighton provided a rich network of spatial and historical contexts through which to explore decolonial transformation, from the architectural fabric of the buildings themselves to the narratives embodied in their collections. The partnership also aligned with the museum's ongoing Culture Change initiative, which aims to embed equity and accountability across its practices, making it a timely and meaningful platform through which to test pedagogical methods of decolonial engagement.

Structured around two phases, Project I: Re-site and Project II: Re-present, the brief tasked students with generating critical spatial proposals through iterative drawing exercises and 3D digital modelling. These design representations functioned not as finalised propositions, but as discursive provocations that foregrounded design's capacity to critique museological authority. Students were encouraged to approach the artefact as a living cultural entity, capable of being reconfigured through speculative engagement rather than preserved as inert display.

As facilitators, our roles were deliberately decentred; rather than instructing outcomes, we guided students as co-researchers and critical collaborators, encouraging them to interrogate their own positionalities, cultural inheritances, and design agency. This pedagogic stance reframed the classroom as a contact zone, a space for negotiating power, authorship, and imagination in relation to both the museum and the wider world.

The resulting outputs extended beyond the studio. In collaboration with Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, students co-produced a QR code trail that embedded their spatial proposals directly into the museum context. Visitors encountering an artefact could scan the accompanying code to access visual and conceptual reinterpretations that displaced curatorial authority and repositioned meaning within plural, student-authored imaginaries. Complementing this was a Lightning Talk series, which convened students, curators, and academics in open dialogue about the implications of decolonial and speculative design within institutional frameworks. Together, these platforms served as key mechanisms for knowledge exchange, inviting students to step beyond the studio and engage live with professional and academic audiences. The QR trail and Lightning Talks functioned not only as dissemination tools but as epistemic ruptures, decentralising the authority of traditional exhibition practices and fostering relational, plural forms of engagement.

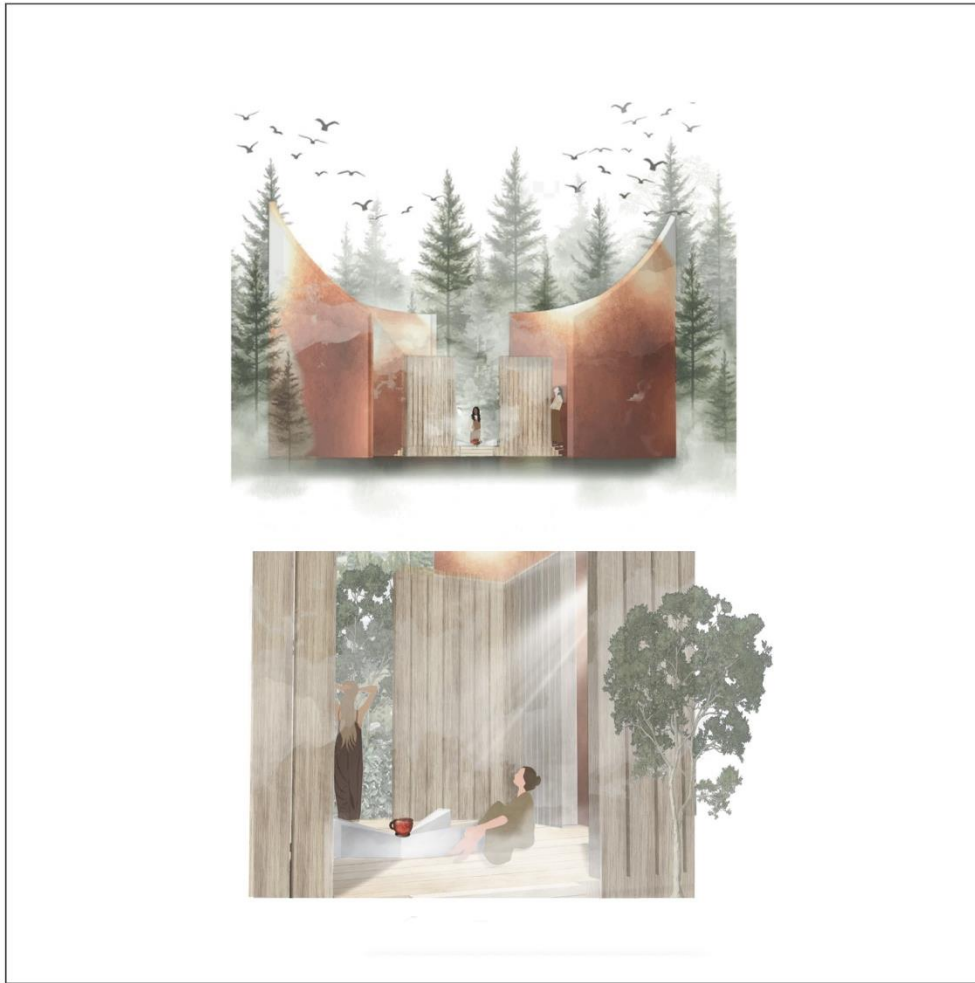
A curated book documenting the process and selected works further consolidates this intervention as a lasting artefact of critical design practice. The *Decontextualise to Decolonise* book brings together student-led spatial proposals, reflective writings, exhibition documentation, and contextual framing to offer a multifaceted record of the project. Positioned between archive and provocation, the book functions as both a pedagogic artefact and a speculative tool circulating the project's ideas beyond the confines of the studio and into broader academic and institutional discourse. Its design reflects the project's ethos of plural authorship, with each student's work given space to speak in its own voice while being held within a collective framework. The publication was formally released as part of the institution's summer research showcase and has since been disseminated to academic and

professional networks, reinforcing the role of students as producers of knowledge. By making visible the experimental nature of decolonial design, the book materialises an approach to education as intervention, an archive that invites reactivation and dialogue rather than closure.

The impact of *Decontextualise to Decolonise* is twofold. From a museum decoloniality perspective, it stages a rupture in the authority of the museum as sole narrator by enabling emergent, culturally-situated reinterpretations. The students' proposals function as counter-narratives; spatial acts of refusal that expose the colonial logics underpinning museological display. From a speculative design perspective, the project activates design as a site of plural futures. Rather than reinforcing Western futures, these interventions speculate from within lived, intersectional contexts. The pedagogic value lies in cultivating students' capacity to operate as critical, world-building agents within the field of interior architecture.

### Imagining liberated futures for artefacts: Student proposals

The student projects developed through *Decontextualise to Decolonise* collectively reveal the critical capacity of design education to materialise decolonial thinking through spatial experimentation. These proposals engage with the politics of representation, authorship, and cultural memory, repositioning artefacts not as inert objects of institutional authority but as dynamic agents embedded in social, environmental, and ritual contexts. Several recurring motifs emerged across the body of work. Many students addressed the restoration of cultural agency by relocating artefacts from the museum into spaces of lived experience, natural settings, communal environments, and ritual domains, thereby disrupting the epistemic dominance of institutional display. Others focused on the reanimation of heritage, proposing designs in which artefacts re-enter sensory, spiritual, or functional circulation. This act of reanimation resists the museological impulse to preserve through detachment, fostering active and embodied engagements with heritage. A strong thematic current of healing and wholeness was also evident; students used the artefact as a spatial catalyst for individual and collective wellbeing, creating sanctuaries, reflection chambers, and therapeutic public spaces. These gestures suggest a decolonial ethics rooted not only in critique, but in repair and reparation. The following projects exemplify three distinct, interrelated approaches: ritual and restoration (*Amber Sanctum*), repair and reparation (*The Butcher's Ulu*), and relational re-siting (*Tides of Heritage*).



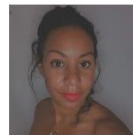
## “ Amber Sanctum: A Space to Reflect and Restore

This project imagines a space that reflects on the history and journey of amber—not just as a cup, but as a material shaped by time. The Amber Cup, a beautifully crafted object from the Bronze Age, was discovered in Hove, resting in an oak coffin, surrounded by nature.

My design takes you back to the beginning—deep in the forest among the trees, where amber’s journey starts. When trees are wounded, they release sap, a natural healing agent. Over centuries, this sap transforms, hardening into amber, a material that lasts forever, holding the memory of nature within it.

The relocation of the Amber Cup is a gesture of decolonisation, returning it to the landscape where it was found, reconnecting it to its origins. The space is hidden within tall copper walls, creating a peaceful retreat. At its centre, the Amber Cup sits over a reflective water fountain, where light dances across its surface, revealing its golden hues and textures.

This space invites visitors to pause, reflect, and restore themselves, much like amber once protected and healed the trees. It is a place of stillness and connection, where nature’s timeless journey comes to life.”



Shavona Phillips

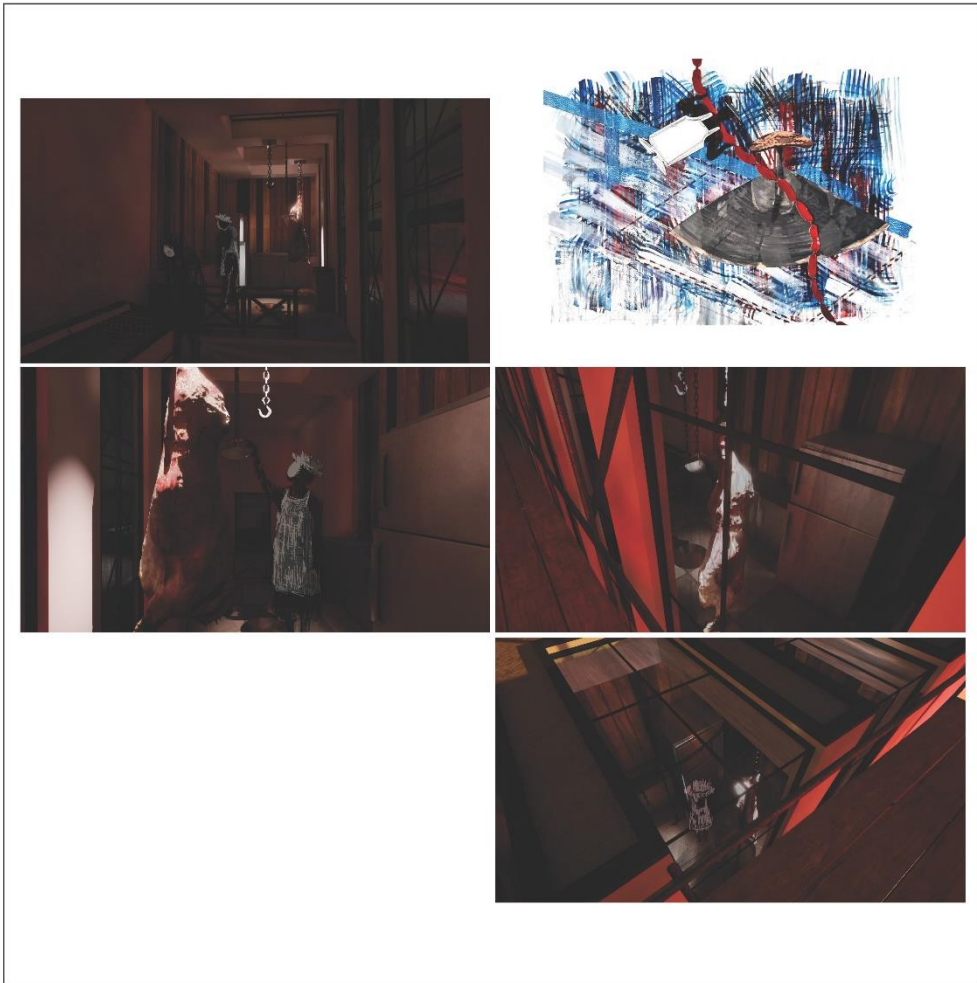
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**Amber Sanctum: A Space to Reflect and Restore by Shavona Phillips**



## “ The Butcher’s Ulu: A Critique on the Commercialisation of Culture

This butcher’s is more of an exhibition space than a regular shop shaped around the ulu’s historical origin—a tool used by women for domestic tasks. I’ve flipped that context here, exploring implied masculinity and how culture is often turned into something to be sold for profit.

The space is designed around the ulu, which have been hung from chains and are used to cut the meat hanging from the racks. The shop has two main sections: a raised workspace where the butchers prepare and cut the meat, and the front area where customers watch. The whole scene is meant to feel eerie, and is communicated through the towering scaffolding, the minimal lighting provided by the streetlights and appliances, and the scratchy figures throughout.

The commercial aspect of this project is a critique of how different cultures often have their traditions taken, repackaged, and sold without credit to the origin. In this case, the ulu has been plucked out in the same manner—mass-produced and sold casually, where now anyone could stumble across it in a ‘random shop around the corner.’”



Joan John

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**The Butcher’s Ulu: A Critique on the Commercialisation of Culture by Joan John**



## “ Tides of Heritage

This project looks at how we can change old buildings to make them more relevant today. It focuses on an old part of a Regency building called a column capital, which is a decorative feature from the Regency era (about the 1800s). This part of the building, once found in old buildings in Brighton, is reimagined in a new way. The column capital is moved to a seaside area near the Brighton 1360, mixing the city's old and new styles.

The project also challenges colonial ideas that are tied to old buildings and shows how we can think about the capital in a new way. By taking it out of its old setting and placing it in a modern, public space, the capital becomes part of the present.

To help connect the past with the future, new capsule pods are added to the area. These pods help the design feel connected to both history, the present, and the future. This project shows how architecture can help us rethink culture and history in public spaces.”



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### Tides of Heritage by Narcis-Alexandru Gheorghe

The projects further reflected an acute awareness of equity and access. Many adopted strategies of inclusive interaction, designing for multisensory engagement, anonymity, or collective authorship,

thereby challenging normative, exclusionary spatial typologies. A recurring emphasis on the multiplicity of meaning positioned the artefact as a polysemic entity, its interpretation shaped by context, community, and cultural relationality. Moreover, several works interrogated the commodification of culture, critiquing the reduction of heritage to consumable spectacle within neoliberal and settler-colonial economies. Spatially, the proposals exhibited both thematic coherence and formal diversity. Site strategies ranged from natural environments, forests and riversides signifying restoration and origin, to reclaimed urban or institutional settings resisting dominant spatial orders, and speculative spaces invoking ritual, memory, and imagination. Material palettes consistently rejected museological sterility in favour of tactile, symbolic, and reclaimed materials: amber, wood, textile, ceramic, glass, alongside atmospheric considerations such as shadow, sound, and natural or seasonal light.

Across the projects, recurring values of reparation, ritual, and relationality reveal how decolonial thinking can be materialised through design. Works such as *The Butcher's Ulu* and *Handle with Care* foreground acts of repair and reversal, critically re-siting objects to expose histories of appropriation and restore cultural agency. Projects like *Amber Sanctum* and *A Sanctuary for Healing* mobilised ritual and embodiment as strategies of healing, reconnecting artefacts to ecological and spiritual lineages erased by colonial museology. Others, such as *Echoes of Colour* (Farida Eltayeb) and *History in Your Hands* (Olivia Cockerton), emphasised relationality and participation, transforming spectatorship into co-authorship and returning sensory knowledge to the public realm. Together, these interventions resonate with Quijano's (2000) notion of delinking from the coloniality of power and Mignolo's (2007) concept of epistemic disobedience, as students reconfigured who is authorised to know and to design (Khan *et al.* 2025).

While these projects articulate compelling acts of delinking and reparation, they also expose the challenges of sustaining decolonial practice within institutional and pedagogic frameworks. The speculative nature of the work, though generative, sometimes risked abstraction, echoing Tuck and Yang's (2012) caution that decolonisation must not become metaphorical or detached from material and communal realities. Similarly, the institutional context of a university–museum partnership shaped the extent to which epistemic disobedience could be realised. These tensions underscore the need for future iterations of *Decontextualise to Decolonise* to move beyond speculative representation toward community-grounded, reparative, and co-authored practice, where design becomes a sustained act of relational accountability rather than a singular pedagogic encounter.

## Conclusion

### Spatial practice and the future of the museum

*Decontextualise to Decolonise* demonstrates the potential of spatial design as a decolonial methodology that reframes cultural narratives, interrogates institutional authority, and enacts restorative engagements with heritage. By repositioning museum artefacts within speculative, contexts, students subverted the objectifying logics of museological display. These design interventions enacted the decolonial materially and spatially, asking urgent questions about ownership and cultural memory.

Through acts of decontextualisation, students exposed the limitations of colonial museology and asserted alternative imaginaries grounded in relationality, embodiment, and plurality. Yet this process also surfaced complex negotiations of student positionality, how emerging designers locate themselves ethically in relation to cultural artefacts, community narratives, and institutional power.

Working within a university–museum partnership revealed tensions between pedagogic freedom and institutional constraint, particularly in navigating the responsibilities of representation and the politics of access.

While speculative design offered a productive mode of imagining liberated futures, its limitations in addressing histories of violence and dispossession became clear. Speculation alone cannot repair structural inequities or restore displaced heritage, but it could open the imaginative space from which community-grounded and reparative practices might emerge. Future iterations will therefore deepen collaboration with community custodians and extend design processes toward forms of co-authored making, care, and restitution.

The museum, in this pedagogic encounter, was not re-encountered, it was transformed from a site of institutionalisation into a contact zone for counter-narratives and shared authorship. This project affirms the necessity and urgency of embedding decolonial praxis within design education. It calls for distributed authorship and co-creation. In centring plurality of meaning, method, and memory, the project not only aligns with decolonial thought but also offers tangible strategies for institutional transformation through design.

Positioned within wider global dialogues, *Decontextualise to Decolonise* resonates with international movements and parallel experiments in reimagining museum work (for example, Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures Collective and Critical Heritage Studies Network) and projects across the Global South that foreground community-led curation and spatial justice. By addressing similar concerns, the project situates its local practice within a shared global effort to delink from colonial epistemologies and to reposition design education as a site of plural, transnational knowledge exchange.

As a pilot initiative, *Decontextualise to Decolonise* lays the groundwork for a broader research trajectory. Future work will expand the scope of inquiry into the politics of authorship and relationality: Who is authorised to re-situate and re-narrate displaced cultural objects? How can these roles be shared ethically across designers, communities, and institutions? Additionally, the methodological use of decontextualisation will be extended beyond museum contexts into educational, commercial, and domestic domains where cultural framing continues to shape identity, power, and belonging. *Decontextualise to Decolonise* ultimately illustrates that decolonial design is an iterative, situated act of reworlding, one that must continually hold space for discomfort, negotiation, and accountability as it seeks to remake not only space, but the stories we tell within it.

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