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Lighting flexibility was the answer for Polygon Gallery

As the largest non-profit gallery in Canada, Polygon Gallery is a striking new building, designed by Patkau Architects, located on the harbor in North Vancouver. ERCO LED lighting tools were used both in the exhibition rooms and in the shop area of the gallery, combining a high degree of flexibility with a linear design and efficient visual comfort.

The gallery shows Canadian contemporary art with a focus on photography and media art. The architects designed the two largest exhibition rooms on the upper floor to be airy and spacious, which receive natural daylight via skylights. This ensures glare-free lighting of the rooms during the day without any drop shadows. To keep the difference between daylight and artificial light as minimal as possible, the planners opted for ERCO LED lighting tools with a neutral white light color of 4000K.

ERCO luminaires are ideal for lighting art, as they provide uniform, glare free general lighting on the one hand, and precise accentuation of the exhibits on the other. The main galleries feature

Light Board spotlights and wallwashers, which can be flexibly adapted and precisely aligned to the varied exhibits the gallery will host. The easy adjustability, innovative lighting technology and the linear and unobtrusive design of Light Board convinced the planners. With integrated control gear in their flat housings, the luminaires appear completely homogeneous, blending in visually with the overall design of the rooms.

The architects reinforced the contrast between the transparent ground floor and the closed upper floor, visible from outside, by choosing different LED lighting tools. In the large ground floor, they decided to illuminate individual exhibits with Pollux contour spotlights for their distinct beams. This way, the works set themselves apart from the shop areas and draw attention to the actual exhibition on the upper floor.

For more information, visit www.erco.com

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Examining All Facets

When visiting natural history museums, I am often drawn to their beautiful collection of gemstones. Diamonds and sapphires are my favorite, in case you're planning ahead for my birthday.

While wandering by the cases of unique stones, I not only marvel at their natural strength and sparkle, but I take the time to closely inspect the individual stones. Through a magnifying glass or microscope, each gemstone often reveals dozens of facets, the flat geometric shapes that deliver the shine we love. Facets provide unique colors, intricate designs, and beauty rarely found elsewhere.

Is there a management lesson to be found in the facets of precious stones? Absolutely, because we often need to explore, deeply, the facets of our proverbial precious stones to address the challenges that keep us and our institutions from true excellence.

When I joined the Alliance, we developed a strategic plan for how to best serve the museum field. We made diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) in all aspects of museums' structures and programming one of our core focus areas because many in the field said it was a top concern, vital to museums' viability, relevance, and sustainability. After a few years of working in these areas, we know there is still a lot of work ahead. I, along with the rest of AAM's dedicated team and board, am committed to looking through each and every facet of this precious stone in order to accelerate change, both within AAM and across the field.

One facet that has gone virtually unaddressed is the role of museum boards and leadership in DEAI. AAM and BoardSource recently examined museum board leadership and found a stark disconnect. The survey revealed that nearly half of museum boards are entirely white. Three-quarters of museum

directors believe the diversity of their boards is important, but far fewer have developed action plans to become more inclusive, provided inclusion training to their boards and staffs, or implemented other changes to the status quo.

To begin to fill this gap and address museums' needs and desires to better reflect the communities they serve, we are launching a national initiative called **Facing Change: Advancing Museum Board Diversity & Inclusion**. Backed by \$4 million in grants from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Alice L. Walton Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, this three-year initiative will provide the framework, training, and resources that museum leaders need to build inclusive cultures within their institutions.

To make real and lasting change, work needs to be done at the top where each museum's tone and priorities are established. Through this initiative, AAM aims not only to complement museums' hard work and investments to diversify their talent pool, programming, and collections, but also to drive long-lasting systemic culture change.

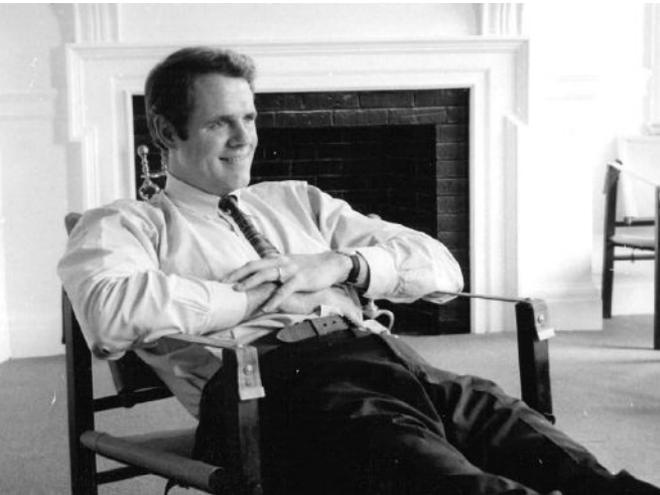
If you are interested in learning more about this facet of our DEAI work, please visit our website. I hope you will join us in this vital work for museums' relevance and sustainability.



Laura L. Lott is the Alliance's president and CEO. Follow Laura on Twitter at [@LottLaura](#).

In Honor of a Museum Giant

By Elaine Heumann Gurian



Michael Spock, who died on December 7, 2018, at age 85, changed museums the world over and forever. He became the director of the Boston Children’s Museum in 1962 at age 29 and remained there for 23 years.

Michael was the dyslexic son of the famous pediatrician Benjamin Spock, a fact that made his school difficulties visible to many. He held the first junior membership at the Museum of Modern Art because he attended so often; he had discovered that he learned best by having real objects around. Because of his school experiences, Michael was interested in theories of progressive education for children, especially those struggling in regular school. These became the foundational theories of the Boston Children’s Museum.

Michael turned the venerable but staid Boston Children’s

Museum into a world model of hands-on learning for children visiting on their own, in groups, and with their parents or caregivers. His specialty was narrative and additive content rather than episodic experiences, and the museum leaned toward exhibitions of cultural and social problems. The staff piloted the use of real collections within a mix of reproductions and manufactured experiences, and the museum broadened its reach with school kits, afterschool activities, and teacher training.

Michael was deeply committed to an inclusionary philosophy that built an internal staff commune. Those fortunate enough to be in the ensemble learned on the job, were encouraged to take risks, trusted and took care of each other, grew self-assured under his guidance, and were encouraged not only to trust their moral compasses, but to see that confidence as a contribution to the museum’s mission. Anyone uttering “It does not feel like us!” could sink a seemingly good idea. Many of his team members had never thought of themselves as ordained to be successful and were surprised when others supported their progress. It was a supportive culture with Michael as the head cheerleader.

Michael’s children’s museum model was emulated hundreds of times the world over but

often without consideration to the original deep philosophical aspirations and constant tryouts to get it right. His staff, who did not have traditional museum professional titles or responsibilities, was credited as a founder of the team approach to the exhibition design movement. He said his goal was to create “landmark experiences” and “aha moments,” and the museums at which he worked (he went to the Field Museum from 1986 to 1995) created both. The inclusion of children’s spaces and exhibition interactivity embedded in adult museums everywhere owe much to the work Michael facilitated.

Michael, with his seemingly shy “aw shucks” presentation, was committed to bold social action, museum politics, design excellence, architectural innovation, and precise fiscal supervision. What was informal and welcoming was also always excellently but consensually managed.

Many people across the current American museum landscape owe their career beginnings to Michael’s generous support and ongoing kindness. His legacy has been played forward in so many places that the experiments he oversaw now seem embedded in the very definition of museums.

Read more about Michael’s work at Boston Stories at bcmstories.com.



Courting Controversy

62%
of Americans
want Confederate
memorials to
stay; only 37%
of museum
professionals
agree.

Wilkening Consulting/Naperville Heritage
Society, 2018 Inclusive History National
Audience Research

81%
of Americans say
museums are
trustworthy.

Wilkening Consulting 2018 broader
population sampling



55%

of Americans
think immigrants
strengthen the
country; 26%
think immigrants
are a burden.

Pew Research Center



Museo de Arte y Diseño de Miramar

A once dilapidated historic property has been transformed into Puerto Rico’s first design-centric museum. Museo de Arte y Diseño de Miramar (MADMi), which opened in December 2018, encourages the appreciation and understanding of design and its crucial role within a society as a catalyst for creative dialogues and new perspectives.

Location: San Juan, PR

Learn more: madmi.org/en

Cincinnati Museum Center

In November 2018, the Union Terminal, an 85-year-old former train station and current home of the Cincinnati Museum Center (CMC), reopened after a two-and-a-half-year structural restoration. The \$228 million restoration was largely funded by an estimated \$175.7 million in Hamilton County sales tax revenue from a five-year, one-quarter of 1 percent sales tax approved by voters in November 2014. Over the next several years, CMC will debut new permanent exhibits and galleries in phases.

Location: Cincinnati, OH

Learn more: cincymuseum.org/union-terminal-restoration/

Golden History Museum

Golden History Museum has undergone a renovation that has added new programming spaces, a research center, a hands-on gallery for families with young children, and dynamic new exhibits that highlight the city’s collection of historic objects. With the vision of “always something new to discover,” the renovated museum brings the behind-the-scenes practices of object discovery and preservation to the front of the house.

Location: Golden, CO

Learn more: goldenhistory.org

What’s New at Your Museum?

Do you have a new temporary or permanent exhibition, education program, partnership/initiative, or building/wing? Tell us at bit.ly/MuseumNewsAAM, and it might be featured in an upcoming issue.

Roberto Tirado; Cincinnati Museum Center; Scott Dressel-Martin



Brian Kimmel; Missouri Historical Society; Conor Goulding, Mote Marine Laboratory

Anchorage Museum

“What Why How We Eat” is an interactive exhibition that explores how Alaskans source, process, and share food—and how that feeds the state’s collective identity. From a subsistence whale hunt in Point Hope to a halal market in Anchorage, the changing story of food culture in Alaska is told through filmed interviews, utensils, tools, art installations, and recipes. The exhibition explores themes like land and interdependence, tradition and modernity, and the Alaska home kitchen and the future of food.

Dates: Jan. 12, 2020

Location: Anchorage, AK

Learn more: anchagemuseum.org/exhibits/what-why-how-we-eat/

Soldiers Memorial Military Museum, Missouri Historical Society

The revitalized Soldiers Memorial Military Museum reopened in downtown St. Louis on November 3, 2018, following a two-year, \$30 million renovation. Every effort was made to maintain the architectural and historic integrity of the 1938 art deco structure while also bringing it up to contemporary museum standards. Renovations included refurbishing the lower level to double the amount of exhibition space, making the building ADA accessible, and adding more visitor amenities and all-new exhibits.

Location: St. Louis, MO

Partners: Mackey Mitchell Architects, Gallagher & Associates, Solomon Group

Learn more: mohistory.org/memorial

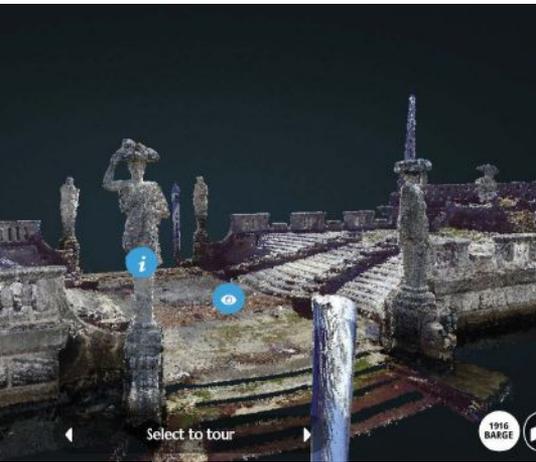
Florida Keys History & Discovery Center

The new permanent exhibition “Coral Reef Exploration” features three aquariums, educational storyboards, interactive kiosks, video monitors, and a game geared to children. The largest of the aquariums, at 1,250 gallons, showcases species making their home around the Florida Keys coral reefs, including angel fish, butterfly fish, tangs, and wrasse. The other aquariums feature up-close views of invasive lionfish, crustaceans, and reef fish.

Location: Islamorada, FL

Partner: Mote Marine Laboratory

Learn more: keysdiscovery.com/exhibits



Vizcaya Museum & Gardens

Vizcaya has launched a new interactive initiative to virtually transport visitors to spaces of the estate that are not accessible to the public, such as the barge and swimming pool grotto. Through multitouch technology, visitors can explore these spaces for the first time and interact with hotspots that reveal the stories of the sculptural and architectural elements.

Location: Miami, FL

Learn more: virtualvizcaya.org

Brigham City Museum of Art & History

“The Spike at 150: Myths and Realities” celebrates the 150th anniversary of the completion of the first transcontinental railroad at Promontory, Utah. The exhibition explores not only the building of the railroad but also the legends around it: Is there really a mass grave of Chinese workers in the Brigham City Cemetery? Did competing workers blow each other up as they approached Promontory? A companion exhibition, “Zhi Lin: Tracing Chinese Workers’ Footsteps to Promontory Summit,” explores the Chinese experience in building the railroad.

Dates: Mar. 23–June 15

Location: Brigham City, UT

Learn more: brighamcitymuseum.org

McKee Botanical Garden

“Seward Johnson—Celebrating the Familiar” features Johnson’s monumental sculpture *Embracing Peace* and 20 sculptures from his *Celebrating the Familiar* series. At 25 feet tall, *Embracing Peace* was inspired by V-J Day in New York City, August 14, 1945, when Americans were jubilant that World War II was over. The 20 life-scale bronze figures depict what Johnson refers to as “the beautiful moments of ordinary life.”

Dates: through April 28

Location: Vero Beach, FL

Learn more: mckeearden.org/events_category/exhibitions/

Mark Osterman; Andrew J. Russell, Union Pacific Officers at Promontory; *Embracing Peace* by Seward Johnson © 2004, 2005, The Seward Johnson Atelier, Inc.

Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology at Harvard, Thomas Hart Benton, *Running Horses*, 1955. Collection of the Maier Museum of Art at Randolph College. Copyright: Visual Artists and Galleries Assoc. (VAGA), Benton Testamentary Trusts/UMB Bank/licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology at Harvard University

“Caspian: The Elements” features the evocative imagery of Chloe Dewe Mathews, the 2014 recipient of the Peabody Museum’s Robert Gardner Fellowship in Photography. The exhibition documents her five-year journey through the contested borderlands of the Caspian Sea, revealing the essential role played by elemental materials like oil, rock, and uranium in the practical, artistic, spiritual, and therapeutic aspects of daily life.

Dates: Apr. 27, 2019–Feb. 17, 2020

Location: Cambridge, MA

Learn more: peabody.harvard.edu

Maier Museum of Art at Randolph College

“Developed and Disturbed: Visions of the American Landscape” examines how landscape art may reveal an increasing tension between nature and industry within the United States. The exhibition includes works in a variety of media, from the 19th century to the present, that address this tension in subtle and thought-provoking ways.

Dates: through Aug. 25

Location: Lynchburg, VA

Learn more: maiermuseum.org



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Finding Resilience in Challenging Times

Museums must embrace new values if they are to survive into the next century.

By Olga Viso



After Donald Judd (Corner Chair 19.75), 2018, in the author's yard at the beginning of its stay.

Last year for nearly six months, a chair designed by the artist collective OOIEE inhabited the yard of my Minneapolis home. Fashioned out of metal and compacted birdseed, *After Donald*

Judd (Corner Chair 19.75), 2018, references the iconic design of American minimalist sculptor Donald Judd. Now a staple of most 20th-century museum design collections, the Judd chair has significant value in today's art market. Despite Judd's formal intents and utilitarian concerns, this highly prized object designed for his home has become an emblem of power, wealth, taste, and class in contemporary Western society.

Living through a season with OOIEE's transmogrified simulacrum of Judd's icon, I observed the chair's slow evolution as it withstood the elements. At first, neighborhood animals approached the new lawn object with fear and suspicion, even disdain. But once the first brave creatures investigated, visitations increased. As winter hastened, the chair became a vital food supply for birds, squirrels, mice, and voles, all vying for a piece of the treasure before the first snow.

The dynamic of this backyard ecology provided a fascinating demonstration of today's capricious consumer economy in action. In the current political climate fueled by rage, special interests, and

polarizing leadership, the curious microcosm also offered a potent metaphor reflecting the fragile state of American democracy. Its consumption suggested the worst aspects of late capitalist society and the US's diminishing position around the globe. Its deterioration encapsulated the challenge that all forms of institutionalized thinking are experiencing as American and Western culture continue to reckon with centuries of racism and systemic inequities.

There is no question that we are living in an unprecedented time of accelerated societal change that is shaking the foundations of institutions everywhere, including art museums. As platforms for artists and audiences to reflect on the contemporary moment, museums and the art they present have increasingly become flash points highlighting society's most pressing concerns.

Crisis of Conscience and Confidence

In recent years, we have witnessed public calls to decolonize the museum space: the return of objects taken from other cultures, fierce debates about who has the right

Courtesy of OOIEE and co. (company projects)

to tell whose story, exhibitions of alleged #MeToo offenders deferred or cancelled, and artworks memorializing nations' racist pasts taken down and/or recontextualized. Artists and activists, including hundreds of museum staff, have urged organizational leaders to disavow patrons involved in socially irresponsible investments that perpetuate violence and addiction.

These events have shaped contemporary museum culture, motivating a profound questioning of the ongoing relevance and purpose of museums. Will institutions founded on 19th-century values become reliquaries for the dead and a painful reminder of the past?

Or will they become testament to a history that is organic, inclusive, alive, and whole for all people and all times?

As museum directors, staff, and governing bodies wrestle with these questions, moral conflicts have emerged. The result has been a crisis of conscience and confidence within museums that has yielded high turnover rates at all levels of organizations, especially at the top. In 2017 and 2018 alone, a surprising number of institutional leaders in the US and Europe abruptly departed. Some directors were summarily and unceremoniously dismissed, others the subject of formal investigations. Still

others found themselves managing impossible situations in which they were caught between donors protecting the status quo and younger staff members demanding swift accountability to audiences seeking transparency and true structural change.

It was the year of the "Curator as Scapegoat," according to Berlin art critic Jörg Heiser. In a keynote lecture delivered at the annual conference of the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art in November 2018, Heiser examined the social, economic, and political forces affecting cultural leadership today. Using Ruben Östlund's

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MORE ON OOIEE

OOIEE (Office Of Interior Establishing Exterior) is a Minneapolis-based transdisciplinary studio that works on projects related to art, design, learning, architecture, and landscape. Founded by Matt Olson in 2016, OOIEE (pronounced “we”) has an “open practice” model informed by a love of research and an interest in using art history as material. The studio participates in “climates of knowledge” with an open heart and is committed to intentions of generosity, kindness, and expansiveness. Its projects have been shown at the Aspen Art Museum, Etage Projects in Copenhagen, and ANNEX at M+B Gallery in Los Angeles.

After Donald Judd (Corner Chair 19.75) was part of a larger exhibition of OOIEE’s new work “I’ve heard it both ways,” presented at co. (company projects), an alternative art space founded by my husband, visual artist and publisher Cameron Gainer. The gallery and project space operate in the storefront below our Minneapolis apartment. Our home and exhibition space share an outdoor garden designed by OOIEE, where the Judd-inspired “finch chair” was installed.

This is not the first time that Olson and his work have inspired resilient thinking. In 2013, I commissioned him (and his previous studio, RO/LU) to design a kickoff event for Propositions for the Future of the Art Museum, a conference of international art museum leaders at the Aspen Institute; our goal was to imagine new models for museum operations, financing, and collections. The resulting provocation, “Chasing After Something That Hasn’t Happened Yet,” offered readings, a video, and a playbook for attendees to follow as I read, joining in at select times. Turning a common trust-building exercise for group meetings on its side, the “icebreaker” exposed the ease with which even the most independent thinkers conform to group norms.

recent film *The Square* as a springboard, which follows the downfall of a fictitious Swedish museum director embroiled in a public controversy, Heiser addressed the 2018 dismissals of real-world directors and curators Chris Dercon, Okwui Enwezor, and Beatrix Ruf in Europe, and Helen Molesworth, Laura Raicovich, and Philippe Vergne in the US. Heiser suggested that decades of exponential growth and museum expansion, an increased reliance on mega-exhibitions (or blockbusters) to deliver audience and admissions, and new trends that “event-tize” cultural experience have contributed to the current crises.

Museum Leadership in Crisis

In this climate of volatility and discontent, a growing number of museum professionals have chosen to leave the profession. Those departing cite a variety of root causes, including frustration, burnout, internal resistance to change, and the challenge to curatorial freedom. Most describe reaching an unacceptable level of personal compromise.

As a museum leader at the center of a cultural appropriation debate in 2017, I found myself in this position despite a positive resolution to the controversy. Since my departure, I have tracked nearly 20 other curators and directors who have also left (or opted out of) the field. While some have moved into the commercial sector, others have cultivated consulting careers, affecting the sector from the outside rather than from within.

What might this trend mean for museums? What does the face of museum leadership look like in another decade when the average tenure of an art museum director trends more toward 3–5 years rather than 10 years, and there continues to be steady rates of retirement? How does an already limited pipeline of qualified candidates address the growing leadership void at a time when museums most need seasoned leadership, tenacity, and resilience?

A survey of recent directorial hires in the US indicates that the criteria for leadership is evolving. More first-time directors and professionals from disciplines outside the curatorial ranks are stepping up, including museum educators, marketing directors, chief operating officers, development directors, and financial managers. Board leaders are also vying for and stepping into full or interim executive roles, some with little or no nonprofit experience. At New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, artistic direction and financial oversight were recently split between the director and a highly qualified trustee. Such shared executive leadership models provide an opportunity to redefine leadership roles to make them more sustainable.

While the diversification of the candidate pool allows for new skill sets to enter the mix, artistic and curatorial vision may at times be secondary to other agendas. Without strong agreement around shared values, however, this can lead to untenable conflicts and compromise. Last year’s crises

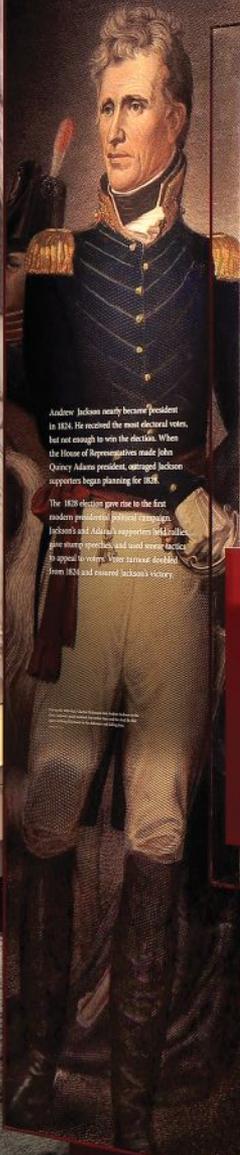
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Andrew Jackson nearly became president in 1824. He received the most electoral votes, but not enough to win the election. When the House of Representatives made John Quincy Adams president, outraged Jackson supporters began planning for 1828.

The 1828 election gave rise to the first modern presidential political campaign. Jackson and Adams's supporters held rallies, gave stump speeches, and used various tactics to appeal to voters. Voter turnout doubled from 1824 and ensured Jackson's victory.

JACKSON PRESIDENCY



It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful have not often found the energy of government to their selfish purposes."

...to be regretted that the rich and powerful have not often found the energy of government to their selfish purposes."

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The chair after it had become part of the ecosystem.

at the Queens Museum in New York and at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles highlighted the devastating consequences when staff and board leaders are not aligned on core values.

In this unpredictable environment, I worry about how hospitable the field will continue to be to women and people of color. The recent announcement of Kaywin Feldman to lead the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, marked a significant milestone; a glass ceiling was visibly broken. Yet Feldman remains one of only a handful of female museum directors in the US running institutions with annual operating budgets exceeding \$30 million. And there are even fewer directors of color running organizations of any scale.

So, what does this mean for new colleagues benefiting from recent funding initiatives launched by AAMD and major foundations, such as Mellon, Ford, and the Walton Family, to diversify museum leadership for the future? What if the boards governing institutions don't also change? Will emergent leaders with value systems that continue to challenge the status quo be able to rise within the ranks? And even more important, will new talent even want these

jobs, or be able to retain them, if the values of those who govern remain out of sync?

Those who work in museums (or aspire to do so) have a choice, fully knowing the paths that will render institutions irrelevant if change is not forthcoming. Recent staff protests at the Whitney Museum concerning the ethics of a trustee's business dealings highlighted the lack of alignment between the donor's values and the more humanitarian concerns of the museum and the people who work there. Another level of reckoning has commenced, and more employees at museums across the country continue to vote with their consciences and their feet.

Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance, a new book by philanthropy executive Edgar Villanueva, exposes the colonial dynamics at play in giving that lead to inequity and dysfunction. Patrons, and those governing museums, have an opportunity to model extraordinary humility and inspire exemplary change rather than reinforce persistent institutional double standards.

A New Set of Museum Values

I believe a *tabula rasa* is necessary if museums are to survive into the next century. A complete reimagination would reframe leadership around values-based thinking rather than performance-driven metrics. This means that those who lead and those who govern must equally dispense with the short-term measures of attendance,

profit, expansion, and market validation. Instead, longitudinal perspectives that focus on building a creative culture and investing in youth would prevail.

The new culture, underpinned by the values of freedom, civility, tolerance, and resilience, would support artistic and creative freedom; strive to create a productive, healthy, and inclusive society; and foster responsible citizenry. Supporting audiences of the future would be the absolute priority. Conflicts and controversies would be embraced and thoughtfully analyzed. Underlying conditions and causalities would be understood rather than brushed under the table. Root causes rather than symptoms would be addressed. Experimentation would be incentivized. Failure would be tolerated. Humility and the desire to learn would be rewarded.

In the new normal, sociologist Steven Tepper's *Not Here, Not Now, Not That! Protest Over Art and Culture in America* would be on every museum professional's reading list. In this thoughtful study, first published in 2011, Tepper identifies common factors—including large population growth and significant immigration—across 71 US communities that have experienced art controversies. He asks why a play, a book, a film, or a public artwork is controversial in one community and not in another 100 miles away. His research offers a potent reminder that art—and the public response to it—has the power to reflect and express the mores and values of a society, especially when

they are rapidly changing. His research is grounded in the firm conviction that art surfaces the questions that a society *needs* to ask to evolve and remain healthy and productive.

As I looked out my window this past December, I saw the last vestiges of OOIEE's recast Judd chair. A community of birds was quietly feasting, when one generous finch dropped a seed midair to another in flight (see photo at left). I smiled. For the first time in a long year of disappointment, I released some of the anger that the trauma of leaving my position had elicited. I felt resilient again and motivated to confront the

challenges and possibilities offered by this compelling artwork and all that the chair's "poetic surrender" to the elements and the animal's gesture of empathy portend.

I appreciate that what I first saw as a harsh work of institutional critique, one forecasting the inevitable demise of culture and an end to its museums, actually models a far more optimistic future. Yes, OOIEE's provocation does ask us to acknowledge that "the paradigms so many of us have been playing along with are falling apart." It also challenges us to imagine their radical renewal. Ultimately, the artists of OOIEE invite us to trust in the

"becoming" through a generosity and openness to "unbecoming."

Olga Viso is an independent curator and nonprofit arts consultant. She is former director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC. She is currently a senior advisor at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at Arizona State University and a visiting scholar at the Smithsonian Institution. In May 2018, she published "Decolonizing the Art Museum: The Next Wave" for the *New York Times*.



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A New Direction in Interpretation

The Penn Museum's Global Guides program brings an enlightened understanding of the past.

By Ellen Owens and Kevin Schott

"Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. . . . When we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise."—Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



embracing a multiplicity of stories. Additionally, the program begins to address our lack of museum staff diversity and gives voice to people who often have no influence on the interpretation of objects that relate to their own heritage.

About Global Guides

In spring 2017, the Penn Museum submitted a grant to the Barra Foundation's Catalyst Fund to support the Global Guides project, which pays immigrants and refugees to interpret the history of artifacts while sharing stories about life in their home countries. The program directly ties to the museum's mission to "transform understanding of the human experience" and aligns with the Penn Museum's Building Transformation project, which promises re-envisioned galleries and interpretation in the Middle East, Africa, Mexico and Central America, and Egypt and Nubia Galleries.

When we submitted our grant, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement was increasing deportations, and the Trump

High school students hear about Hadi Al-Karfawi's experience as a stone carver in Iraq while also learning about an Assyrian palace relief.



Museums often face the challenge of the single story. The narratives we tell are those of an expert, a person who has academic knowledge of the displayed objects. University museums place an even greater emphasis on this type of knowledge, to showcase the skills of their faculty and support the college classes that use their galleries.

But, as Adichie says, there is never a single story.

We began the Global Guides: Immigrant Stories Tour Program at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn Museum) because we believe that our field must elevate the voices of marginalized people—in this case, immigrants and refugees—thus

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On the tour stop about Queen Puabi's funerary jewelry, Moumena Saradar proudly displays an image of the earrings her grandmother gave her.

administration was seeking to enact his promised Muslim ban. Museums like ours showcase collections that come from countries whose citizens are being deeply affected by these American policies. As we began our work with the Global Guides program, we wondered if the Penn Museum could become a catalyst for greater understanding across perceived differences locally and globally.

An hour-long Global Guide tour, currently available in the Middle East Galleries but expanding to two additional galleries, has six stops at key objects. The guides—Hadi Al-Karfawi, Yaroub Al-Obaidi, and Moumena Saradar—describe the historical importance and key facts at each stop and then share a personal narrative that connects the object to a powerful memory of life in their home country. An outside consultant strengthened the guides' capacity for storytelling through an iterative process that formed connections between gallery objects and memories that offer windows into Middle Eastern culture.

For example, the museum displays a small, nondescript spindle whorl, which the guides

TIPS FOR ELEVATING NEW NARRATIVES

- Partner with organizations with expertise in working with immigrant and refugee populations.
- Plan ahead, start small, and roll out your project slowly—this work takes an enormous amount of time and energy.
- Find advocates within your institution and its communities.
- Teach yourself and your colleagues to speak and write in culturally sensitive language that helps the program's objectives without further marginalizing people.
- Face realities about how immigrant communities perceive your institution and its collections; it will take many decades of hard work to change perceptions around the collection's ownership and public good.
- Understand that guides may run into conflict with other people in their cultural communities because they are leading tours.
- Offer trainings that aren't just about the museum; emphasize the usefulness of job-ready skills such as public speaking for newly resettled people.
- Work with storytelling experts to help your guides shape their narratives. Remember that these personal stories truly impact visitors.

have told us older generations in Iraq and Syria still use. The spindle whorl tour stop now includes a story about a well-meaning grandmother's gift of an ugly sweater, crafted from yarn made from a spindle whorl not unlike the 7,000-year-old example in the exhibit case. Visitors can relate to such personal stories, overcoming a challenge inherent to interpreting ancient archaeology and unfamiliar cultural material.

"I believe that these artifacts are an achievement for all of civilization," says Al-Obaidi. "Even if they are from Iraq, all people have the right to hear about and be near to these objects."

Guides participate in the same academic training as our traditional docents, spending time with

curators in the classroom and in collections storage. To help protect the guides' mental health and safety, we hired a museum-affiliated speaker from South Sudan to discuss micro-aggressions and callous questions from visitors, based on her experiences as a person of color presenting to white audiences. We worried about these potential issues, but our project collaborator, Cathryn Miller-Wilson, executive director of the immigrant aid organization HIAS Pennsylvania, told us that "during times of culturally driven fear and stereotypes . . . opportunities for newly resettled people to talk with others about their histories can be a healing and unifying experience, both for the guides and for the general public."

RESOURCES

Global Guides webpage
penn.museum/visit/tours/global-guides

What's On? Global Guides video
youtube.com/watch?v=1cQo600naR0

Encouraging Authentic Voices

Through our partnership with the immigrant aid groups HIAS Pennsylvania and Nationalities Service Center, we realized that many guides did not understand how these objects from the Middle East had come into our collection; they thought the objects had been recently looted. Through candid conversations with the guides, we explained the excavation agreements that the museum had created with local governments, the UNESCO agreement, and the ethical discussions museums are having about cultural objects on foreign soil.

We then listened to the guides' responses without prescribing the answers they would give to their tour participants—the guides say what they feel. Our visitors sense this authenticity. When asked about the best part of their tour, visitors repeatedly say, "The guide," "The stories that the guides shared," or they name the specific guide who gave their tour. Nearly all say they would recommend the tour to a friend. The Global Guides often stay after the tour to answer additional questions, and some visitors even invite them to coffee to continue the conversations.

In fact, early audience evaluations found that three-quarters of

public tour participants came to the museum specifically to take a Global Guides tour—the new narratives attracted more people to our institution. Nearly half of visitors said they had no or very little contact with a person of Middle East origin before their tours, yet by the end of the tour, 82 percent said they were interested in learning more about the Middle East, particularly about its history, art, and culture. Participants also report they are more likely to support agencies like HIAS Pennsylvania and Nationalities Service Center, which assist immigrants and refugees in their resettlement.

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Through the Global Guides program, immigrants and refugees are deepening public engagement with the cultural heritage in our collections by making personal connections to contemporary life. In time, we hope the program can foster social and political change as museums shift away from the single story. For now, the Penn Museum and its objects have never felt more alive.

Ellen Owens is the Merle-Smith director of learning programs and **Kevin Schott** is the associate director for interpretive programs at the Penn Museum.

GUIDE VOICES

Hadi Al-Karfawi, Yaroub Al-Obaidi, and Moumena Saradar are the Penn Museum's Middle East Galleries Global Guides. Here are a few of their thoughts about how the Global Guides program has affected their lives.

"After I started this program, I applied for the Socially Engaged Art master's program at a nearby college. My thesis is about the power of tour programs that involve storytelling, and I am using the Penn Museum as a case study."—Yaroub Al-Obaidi

"When I started giving tours five months ago, it was hard talking about myself. Now I look forward to it. It made it easier for me to expose some of my feelings."—Hadi Al-Karfawi

"Visitors ask me at the end of my tour: 'You are from Syria—is your family safe? Is your house okay; is it still standing?' People are very concerned for me."—Moumena Saradar

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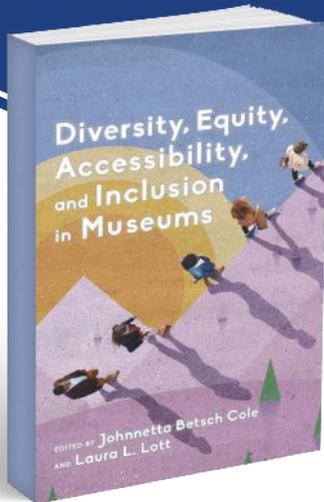
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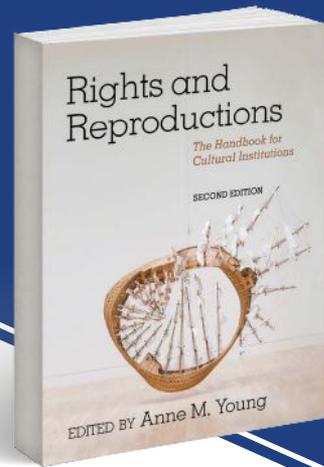
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Johnnetta Betsch Cole is a principal consultant with Cook Ross, Inc. She is also a senior consulting fellow at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Dr. Cole previously served as director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and as president of Spelman College and Bennett College.

Laura L. Lott is the president and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums, the only organization representing the entire scope of the museum community. She frequently speaks to non-profit and museum boards about governance, strategy, and inclusion.

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Anne M. Young heads the rights and reproductions department at the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields and was formerly the photographic archivist for the Kinsey Institute, Indiana University.

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The Activist Exhibition

When we consider art through different lenses, we can engage wider audiences.

By James Christen Steward

In the fall of 2018, a group of Princeton students and I spent the semester exploring the tensions between the historically facing lineage and responsibilities of many museums—our commitment to care for, present, and interpret the past—and the possibilities of a more engaged, “activist” museum. The question I ultimately put to my students was whether a museum might, through its collections and exhibitions, be both past-facing and future-facing, inviting its public to consider issues in a new light or to think differently.

After delving into a number of the key issues, such as the origin story of the modern museum,

ethics, provenance and ownership of the past, and the rise of the blockbuster exhibition in the 1960s, we considered a series of exhibitions that arguably sought to put forward engaged forms of art history. We looked at why these exhibitions succeeded or failed, and the criteria for success or failure.

Our case studies were mostly historical exhumations for my students: Thomas Hoving’s “Harlem on my Mind” (1969) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the tour of Robert Mapplethorpe’s “The Perfect Moment” (1990–1991), Thelma Golden’s “Black Male” (1994) at the Whitney Museum of American



“Nature’s Nation: American Art and Environment” at the Princeton University Art Museum.

Art, and “The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920” (1991) at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Our final case study was the provocation for the course: “Nature’s Nation: American Art and Environment,” organized at Princeton that fall as the first exhibition to attempt a broad reconsideration of American art from 1710 to the present through the lenses of nature and the environment.

Placed alongside other recent exhibitions that seek to connect the dots between past and present in powerful ways, such as the Brooklyn Museum’s “Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power” (2018), the Morgan Library & Museum’s Peter Hujar exhibition (2018), the Museum of Modern Art’s response to the proposed travel ban of early 2017, or other exhibitions considering art



An installation view of Brooklyn Museum’s exhibition “Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power,” which ended in February 2019.

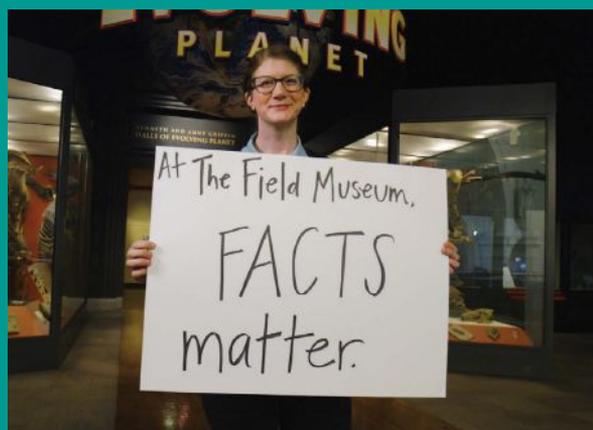
Top photo by Emile Askey; bottom photo by Jonathan Dorado, Brooklyn Museum

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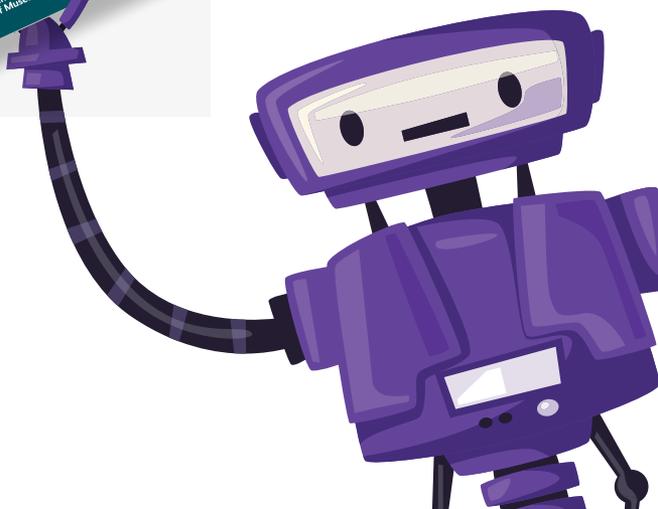
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and social justice, the exhibitions we investigated made powerful connections among the political, the social, and the aesthetic.

Ultimately, these exhibitions ask basic and important questions about art: What is its purpose? Who is it for—the few or the many? Can art and exhibitions deliver a message? What are the implications of taking a risk—for the artist or the institution? And they ask similar questions of the museum itself: Should museums be places of dialogue, including around social change?

For many of the exhibitions we examined, such questions were in the air when much of the art they consider was being made. So perhaps the most daring of these “engaged” projects are those that seek to retell histories with which we are broadly familiar—and, in doing so, seek to re-radicalize the art of the past as anything but safe or simple at the time of its making.

Learning from Controversy

While it’s tempting to identify overarching themes that link the pleasure or failures of the exhibitions we studied, my students and I found more nuanced meanings



Peter Hujar’s *Christopher Street Pier #2 (Crossed Legs)* (1976) was part of “Peter Hujar: Speed of Life” at New York City’s Morgan Library & Museum in 2018.

in the exhibition histories. In some cases, the organizers seem to have been caught unawares by controversy, perhaps insulated by their own familiarity with the material. The readiness of a specific community to be taken in new directions is also key: audiences in Cincinnati and Berkeley had vividly different reactions to “The Perfect Moment.” In other instances, exhibitions became lightning rods for wider issues swirling in the public discourse; “The West as America,” for example, became an exemplar of Western revisionism that was probably destined for controversy in the context of its exhibition at a national institution in the nation’s capital.

But the terms of success and failure are critical to any risk-benefit analysis. When it premiered, “The West as America” struck its audiences viscerally. Critics accused it of being “inaccurate” or “leftist;” many felt it had no place at the Smithsonian. Reading much of the literature of its reception—and

viewing its catalogue—my students felt the exhibition underestimated the degree to which many audiences would find it an assault on core ideas of America that they continued to value—and thus an assault on them. Even as the intended national tour was canceled, the extraordinary debate that ensued in the exhibition’s visitor comment books was itself so lively, engaged, and thought-provoking (one visitor noted that “Re-reading visitors’ comments is almost as provocative as the show”) that the exhibition must ultimately be deemed a success.

In organizing “Nature’s Nation,” we were cognizant of some of the lessons learned from past projects attempting new histories and mining new meanings—especially those whose messages were as topical as climate change and the debate still swirling around it. I regularly reminded the exhibition’s curators that the narrative needed to arise from the objects themselves, rather than from a seemingly predetermined point of view.

CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS

Interested in engaged scholarship or exhibition practices? Consider the following in your planning.

- Know your audiences. Consider what might strike the appropriate balance between dynamic engagement and offense in your community.
- Engage the public in the planning work. Test your key interpretive concepts, vocabulary, and gallery didactics on focus groups.
- Educate your entire staff. If a project’s narrative is especially complex, your staff become essential ambassadors.
- Consider sharing your institutional voice with other, perhaps less traditionally prepared, experts.
- Engage local influencers, including elected officials; they’d probably rather know about anything potentially controversial ahead of time.
- Let the objects on display shape the narrative. When the objects make the visitors’ interpretation inevitable, accusations of “bias” are less likely.

The aesthetics—placed in their original contexts—of the works of art on loan from 70 lenders was essential, especially given the presence of canonical artists such as Charles Willson Peale, Winslow Homer, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Jackson Pollock. The exhibition’s blending of opportunities for pleasure with the revelation of deeper, more complex meanings was critical to the project’s success. Surprise was equally a factor and a strategy. The exhibition presents unexpected or perplexing juxtapositions (a painting by Morris Louis with an 18th-century Chippendale chest, for example) to compel visitors to delve more deeply into the exhibition’s purposes.

For the students in my seminar, engaged scholarship presented in the public setting of a museum felt not only possible but essential—an argument for the impact art museums might still have in the 21st century, and even for a career in the field. One student asked, “After an exhibition like this, how do you go back?”—back, that is, to art for art’s sake.

Many may see the risk of political correctness in such projects or, at the least, of aesthetics

subordinated to a politically motivated argument. But my students have helped me see engagement as a point of entry, a way of allowing aesthetics to meet with wider meanings and to speak to wider audiences.

James Christen Steward is the Nancy A. Nasher—David J. Haemisegger, Class of 1976, director of the Princeton University Art Museum.

**INFO
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“Nature’s Nation: American Art and Environment” is at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, through May 5, 2019, and will be at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, May 25–September 9, 2019.



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Photographs by Kisha Bari are interspersed with articles from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, creating a powerful collage suspended by chain-link fencing reminiscent of the cages used at the US border to detain children.

I AM

A CHILD

How the National Civil Rights Museum rapidly responded to the family separation crisis at the border.

By [Noelle Trent](#)

Courtesy of National Civil Rights Museum

On June 5, 2018, on Twitter and Instagram, Paola Mendoza posted a group shot of children ages 3 to 10 on the steps of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in New York City. The shot was an homage to the iconic Ernest Withers' photograph of the 1968 Memphis sanitation strikers with I AM A MAN signs. In her initial posting Mendoza stated:

A child is a child no matter what country they were born in. A child is a child even when they cross the border. A child's desire to stay with their parents is a human right. In homage to the iconic I AM A MAN photo, I am proud to present I AM A CHILD.

After she posted the photos, teachers on Twitter began to ask Mendoza if they could use the photos in their classrooms. I, too, wanted to use the photos—for an exhibition at the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM). I reached out to Mendoza via direct message on Twitter and via email. She called me within a couple of hours, and we briefly talked about potentially collaborating on an exhibition; we planned to talk the following week with the rest of the NCRM Interpretation, Collections & Education team.

Fast forward to July 26, 2018, a few weeks after Mendoza's initial posts. On that day, NCRM staff gathered for a quick photo shoot in front of its latest exhibition, "I AM A CHILD," as part of a national day of action to draw attention to the ongoing family separation crisis at the US-Mexican border. The photo would be posted and shared on social media, a fitting launch for an exhibition that essentially started on Twitter and went from concept to opening in approximately 45 days.

Why We Needed to Do This

NCRM is located in Memphis, Tennessee, in the historic Lorraine Motel, the assassination site of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Opened in 1991, NCRM is the first museum in the United States specifically dedicated to telling the African American civil rights story. The museum's mission is to chronicle key episodes of the American Civil Rights Movement, examine today's global civil and human rights issues, provoke

thoughtful debate, and serve as a catalyst for positive change. With this mission, NCRM has a unique ability to address both historical and contemporary issues through exhibitions, programming, and collections.

I AM A CHILD was a bold human rights statement inspired by the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike, which brought King to Memphis. The Memphis Sanitation Strike began on February 12, 1968, after two sanitation workers, Robert Walker and Echol Cole, were tragically killed in the back of a malfunctioning garbage truck 11 days earlier. Sanitation



Photograph by Kisha Bari, art direction by Paola Mendoza

workers were, at the time, among the lowest paid city employees, and they had been demanding better working conditions from the city government for years.

The phrase “I AM A MAN,” which was printed on signs carried by the striking workers, had several inspirations. In February 1968, noted activist and strike supporter Rev. James Lawson told the sanitation workers: “For at the heart of racism is the idea that a man is not a man, that a person is not a person. You are human beings. You are men. You deserve dignity.” Also, in the segregated South, “boy” was frequently

used to address black men regardless of their age. The assertion that black men and women were not children was a rallying cry against the systemic racism they were experiencing.

In the famous sign created by African American Joe C. Warren and white minister Rev. Malcolm Blackburn, AM is underlined. The emphasis on this verb affirmed their present state of being and reasserted their humanity and human rights. Since 1968, I AM A MAN and I AM A WOMAN signs have been used throughout the US labor and civil rights movements.

During the exhibition, the National Civil Rights Museum hosted a photo shoot outside the Lorraine Motel, where the museum is housed.



In the case of *I AM A CHILD*, the slogan was used to emphasize the humanity, innocence, and vulnerability of society's youngest members. At the border, children were being ripped away from their parents and given responsibilities beyond their comprehension. Children as young as 2 were placed before judges as major life-altering decisions were being made on their behalf. The children of asylum seekers were being treated as adults in the public sphere; their vulnerability and innocence was lost in the dialogue.

About the Exhibition

The connection between *I AM A CHILD* and its predecessor *I AM A MAN* was clear, and NCRM made that connection apparent to our visitors. The exhibition was placed in the Legacy Building, which is located across the street from the Lorraine Motel.

RAPID-RESPONSE EXHIBITION 101

Museums that want to engage visitors on the pressing issues of today will need to throw out their regular exhibition development timelines. Here are some things the National Civil Rights Museum learned in rapidly deploying the "*I AM A CHILD*" exhibition.

- Create an MOU among all project participants to prevent misunderstandings.
- Be innovative and creative with the concept and implementation. You can do a lot with a little.
- Do your research. Museum-level standards of research and vetting should always be observed no matter the timeline.
- Be flexible and consider installation in phases as the issue evolves.
- Get buy-in from staff at all levels of the organization.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate! Calls, emails, and documents reinforcing process, designs, and implementation are critically important to holding a successful exhibition on an abbreviated timeline.

Since the exhibition appears at the end of the visitor's experience, chain-link fencing was used to mount and hang the photos and panels. In addition to clear, succinct interpretive panels, we incorporated paraphrased excerpts from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into the overall design. For example:

Article 1

All people are born free and equal with dignity and rights. People should treat each other kindly and nicely.

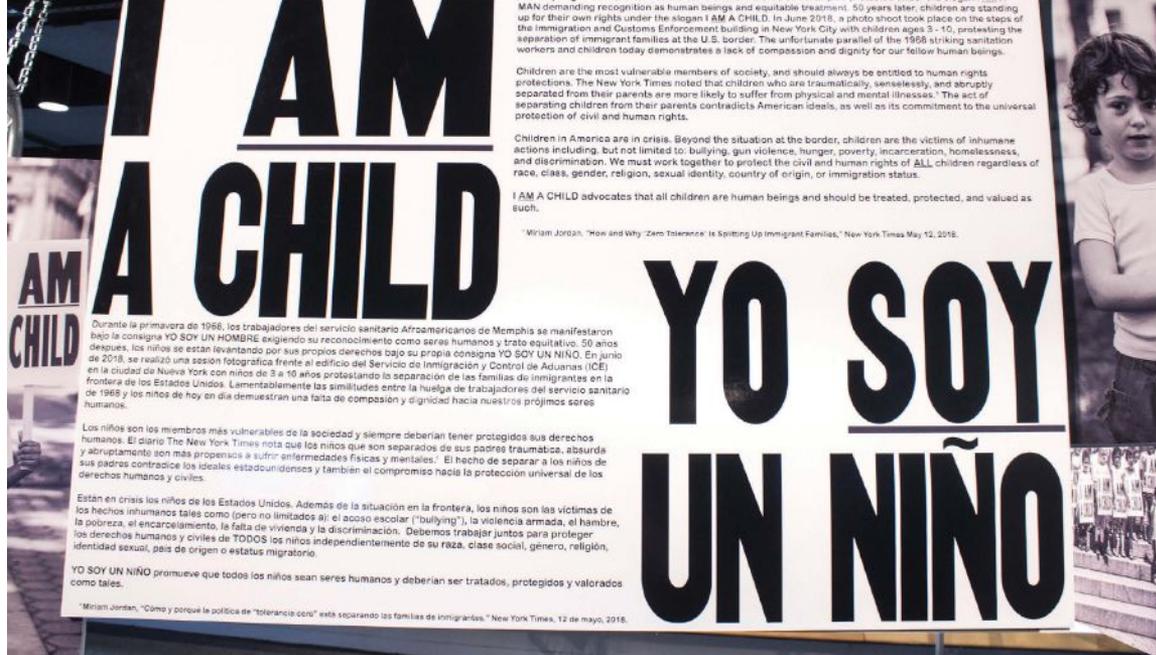
Article 2

Everyone has the same rights, no matter their skin color, their language, their gender, how much money they have, what religion they practice or what they believe in, where they come from, what country they live in, or their political beliefs.

A paraphrased quote from King on the tragic deaths of the young girls killed in the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, hung above the exhibition: "These children—unoffending, innocent, and beautiful—should never become victims of vicious crimes perpetrated against humanity." The exhibition also featured an iPad stand with an open-source, illustrated version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a selfie area with a chalkboard background featuring "ALL CHILDREN HAVE RIGHTS" with words like "family," "home," "friends," etc., in English, Spanish, and Arabic.

In a major achievement, we translated all of the exhibition text, including social media hashtags, into Spanish. Foreign language translation is notoriously expensive, but we were able to crowdsource the translation through the staff's network of local Spanish speakers. The Spanish translators' time and expense were processed as an in-kind donation to the museum. We also gave them passes to the museum.

Flexibility was the key to success for "*I AM A CHILD*." Initially, the museum team wanted to include more detail on the history of immigration in the exhibition. However, time and existing commitments made this unrealistic. Instead, the team focused on the most immediate needs: acquainting visitors with the family separation crisis at the border, introducing them



All exhibition panels are in both English and Spanish, including the anchoring phrase of this movement: I AM A CHILD, YO SOY UN NIÑO.

to the concept of human rights, and opening the exhibition while the issue was still receiving a high level of media coverage. We created the exhibition, which ran through the end of 2018, with the assumption that additional details could be added as the issue evolved.

To make rapid-response exhibitions a reality, museums also need to be flexible with time, money, and resources—which can advantage small to medium-size institutions. This flexibility, however, still needs to coexist with an institution’s standards for exhibition design and research. We were able to minimize costs by printing the images on gator board and using our in-house exhibition preparator/designer for the exhibition design, fabrication, and installation.

More than an Exhibition

The successful launch of the “I AM A CHILD” exhibition led to the second phase of the project. On September 30, 2018, NCRM, along with Mendoza and photographer Kisha Bari, who collaborated with Mendoza on the New York City photo shoot, hosted an I AM A CHILD photo shoot at the museum. After months of planning and collaboration, this was the first face-to-face meeting between the museum team and Mendoza and Bari.

The Memphis photo shoot differed in several ways from its New York counterpart. Since Memphis was ground zero for the I AM A MAN protest, NCRM invited Jesse Jones, the son of union organizer and strike leader Thomas Oliver “T.O.” Jones, along with men who were in Memphis in 1968, local fathers with their children, and museum tour guides to participate.

The men held I AM A MAN signs while children of diverse backgrounds held I AM A CHILD signs. The group portrait as well as individual portraits offered a visually stunning link between the past and the present. The goal of the Memphis photo shoot was not only to create an I AM A CHILD series unique to Memphis, but also to educate the participants about the 1968 Sanitation Strike and the importance of protest.

Additionally, our K-12 educator, Dory Lerner, designed a program where she read children books on protesting—Cynthia Levinson’s *The Youngest Marcher*—and on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—Alexandra Penfold’s *All Are Welcome Here*. The children then created their own signs about what they would stand up for using large index cards and popsicle sticks. The I AM A CHILD—MEMPHIS photo shoot was launched via digital gallery at the end of October 2018.

Family trauma at the border has not stopped. In December 2018, two children tragically died in US detention facilities near the border. Thousands more children remain separated from their families.

Museums are not direct services agencies; however, they have a unique role in shining a light on social injustices and compelling audiences to re-examine a variety of issues. If museums are to be engaging public spaces, deploying exhibitions on contemporary issues is a critical piece of our work.

Noelle Trent, Ph.D, is the director of interpretation, collections and education at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee.



**CREATING
CONVERSATION,
NOT
CONTROVERSY**

By Rae Ostman
and Mitchell Sava

Using narrative nonfiction writing as the springboard, five museums created public programs addressing the intersection of science and religion.

Charlie's room has a lived-in feel. Plastic water bottles, to-go containers and utensils sprinkle the surface of the bedside table. Mismatched socks are scattered around the floor. A pair of big shiny balloons in the corner near the ceiling cheer "Get Well Soon!!" Textbooks sit, forgotten, on the bench beneath them. He has been here at Children's Hospital for months, waiting for his ANC to rise high enough to provide him with some defense against infection.

This was the beginning of the first draft of a piece of nonfiction writing by Sarah Christensen. She is a pediatric nurse who works with children with acute care needs and a Christian who is active in her church. Her piece came to the Museum of Life and Science in Durham, North Carolina, through Think Write Publish, a writing fellowship program at Arizona State University. From 2015 to 2018, the program's Science & Religion project used creative nonfiction

writing to explore how science and religion can reinforce each other to allow a more nuanced, profound, and rewarding experience of our world and our place in it.

Project fellows participated in three intensive workshops focused on developing, writing, marketing, and publishing their creative nonfiction stories about harmonies between science and religion. Also, five of the fellows worked with different museums to develop a public program, inspired by the fellow's story, that would encourage audiences to engage in thoughtful reflection and productive conversation about the relationship between science and religion.

Storytelling in the City of Medicine

Christensen's focus on medicine and religion, as well as the emotional tenor of her story, seemed tailor-made for a compelling adult program in Durham, the "City of Medicine." Durham is one point of the Research Triangle, which has one of the largest life sciences clusters in the country, including three large research universities, numerous pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms, and multiple large health systems.

The Museum of Life and Science partnered with The Monti, a storytelling production company based in the Triangle, for the public event. We decided to follow The Monti's classic format: five speakers, each telling a story on stage in less than 12 minutes. Speakers receive intensive coaching ahead of time but present with no notes. In addition to Christensen's, four others told their stories: a first-year medical and divinity student wrestling with his faith in an anatomy laboratory; an OB/GYN struggling to reconcile her grief with her beliefs after a family tragedy; a woman and her decades-long search for the person who saved her from a childhood accident; and a local scholar-comedian who has found divine forces in the most unexpected places.

Our storytellers deserved a stage equal to their bravery. Enter the third program partner: the Carolina Theatre, a recently restored Beaux Arts cultural space in the center of town. With the theater on board, we could increase our audience size and reach people who might not visit the museum.

More than 500 people purchased tickets and



Families participate in a mindfulness workshop at a Science & Religion program organized by the Children's Creativity Museum in San Francisco, California.



Sarah Christensen presenting her story at the Medicine & Religion event in Durham, North Carolina.



filled the theater on November 3, 2017. When the house lights dimmed and the spotlight came on, the audience was treated to a riveting hour of stories, truly well told. The emotions ran the gamut, from humor to pain, grief to gratitude.

Standing alone in the spotlight, Christensen brought people to tears as she told how she carries on with her duties, even after the children she has been caring for pass away:

My friends often ask me, “How can you believe in a God who lets children die?” Or another one is, “How can you believe in a God who would let these children suffer so much?” These are good questions, and I’ve thought a lot about them. And I think what I have done is reimagined God less as the cause of these tragedies and more as just as heartbroken as I am whenever this happens. And together we return to the bedside time after time. I think that’s what gives me the strength to do so.

Between stories, audience members were encouraged to talk with their neighbors and share their thoughts on social media. Following the program, each person was invited to fill out and self-address a “Postcard to My Future Self.” The postcard was designed to help participants reflect on the intersection

of religion and science and to provide a reminder of their experience three months later, when the postcard would be mailed back to them.

Science & Religion in Other Cities

In addition to the Museum of Life and Science, four other museums created public programs through the Science & Religion project. Each was inspired by the true story of a fellow, who then worked with an experienced educator to develop and implement the program. The first two programs listed are ongoing.

- The Science Museum of Minnesota in Saint Paul created a theater performance dramatizing astronomer Johannes Kepler’s struggles to reconcile his scientific work and his religious beliefs and highlighting current space science that builds on his work. Following the performance, the actors offer questions for reflection and encourage discussion among audience members.
- The Children’s Creativity Museum in San Francisco developed hands-on activities to teach families with young children about mindfulness and its connections to neuroscience and religious practices. For example, in one mindfulness activity, children can create and use a pinwheel to help them control their breathing. Meanwhile, caregivers can read about the scientific reasons that breathing helps reduce stress and the ways that different religions and cultures use slow breathing to focus.

RESOURCES

The Monti video series, vimeo.com/channels/medrel

Science & Religion program documentation, scienceandreligion.thinkwritepublish.org/resources/

- Arizona State University invited the general public to share reflections about the relationship between science and spirituality at an outdoor arts festival in Phoenix. Participants wrote or drew their ideas on paper leaves and added them to a grove of artificial trees. People also participated in an impromptu filmed reflection, which was edited into a video in the style of the “Fifty People, One Question” project.
- The Museum of Science in Boston organized a teacher professional development workshop designed for science educators in faith-based schools. The workshop included a variety of expert speakers who helped participants share and document best practices and useful tools. Eighteen educators attended the workshop and afterwards created a social media group to continue the conversation.

HOW TO TACKLE TOUCHY SUBJECTS

Museums looking to explore controversial topics can employ some of the successful strategies used in the Science & Religion project.

- **Share program goals with participants.**
Explaining the goals of the project helped participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and respecting other points of view.
- **Use personal stories to create connections.**
The perspectives and experiences of real people created an accessible and nonthreatening entry point into the topic. Participants also reported strong empathetic and emotional responses to the personal stories shared in the programs.
- **Provide opportunities for reflection and conversation.** Participants enjoyed formulating their own ideas and hearing from others. They reported that both the reflection and interaction that the programs encouraged helped them gain insights into the relationship between science and religion.
- **Document participant ideas.**
The opportunity to record their ideas by writing, drawing pictures, or being filmed motivated some people to participate in the programs and confirmed that their thoughts were important.
- **Create opportunities for extended engagement.** Some participants were interested in continuing the conversation with their group or sharing what they had heard, thought about, and discussed with other people later on.

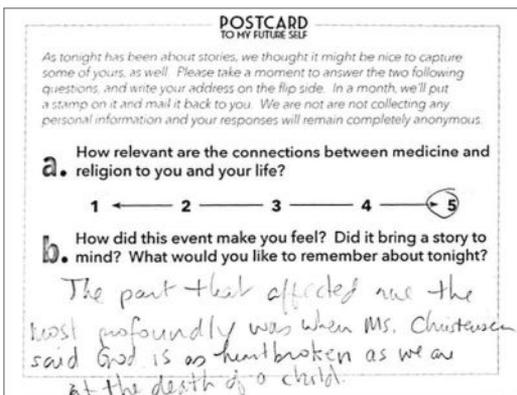
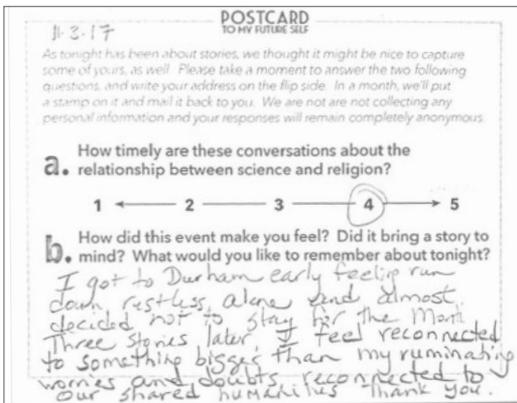
The Programs’ Goals

The Science & Religion project was both exciting and a little scary for the educators who created the public programs. Science centers and children’s museums usually avoid addressing topics, like religion, that can be controversial. However, museum visitors’ values and beliefs influence how they experience museums—including the science presented in our exhibits and programs. This project was an opportunity to engage with those values and beliefs directly in a positive and nonconfrontational way.

The five programs were deliberately diverse in terms of target audience and format, but they shared several goals: to explore the relationship between science and religion in ways that were timely and important; create program content that participants would find interesting and personally relevant; and provide opportunities for learners to gain insights into the relationship between science and religion.

The educators who developed the programs used a number of common design principles to achieve these goals. First, all of the programs shared an *inclusive approach* that invited different ideas about the relationship between science and religion. They did not present any perspective as “right,” nor did they try to convince participants of anything. Instead, the programs asked participants to consider the possibility that science and religion can be in dialogue and that insights from one can inform the other.

Second, *storytelling* was used as an accessible, personal entry point to the topic. The creative nonfiction stories that inspired each program created an opportunity for reflection and invited other perspectives in ways that an impersonal, authoritative voice would not have.



Self-addressed “Postcard to My Future Self” used at the Medicine & Religion event in Durham, North Carolina.

Finally, the programs were designed to be *participatory*. They provided a variety of ways for people to engage with the topic and with each other.

Impact on the Public and Museums

The project’s evaluation methods included quantitative and qualitative data collected through brief surveys, written and drawn responses, and program team observations. The evaluation was designed as an embedded component in each program. For example, the Postcard to My Future Self that participants filled out at the Medicine & Religion event in Durham was an opportunity for them to reflect on and be reminded of their experience, and it served as our evaluation tool. Each postcard included one question for participants to answer on a scale of 1 to 5 and one open-ended prompt.

We collected quantitative data from 361 participants, and they gave the programs an average ranking for all measures at around 4 or above (on a 5-point scale). We also received qualitative feedback from 274 participants who responded to open-ended questions. Almost 83 percent of participants from all five programs said their experience was positive.

What’s next for Science & Religion? Some of the programs are still being presented as they are described here, while others have inspired new and different efforts. The project team is also planning a new project focused on dialogue about big questions related to science and religion.

While Science & Religion was a relatively small and exploratory project, it has had a big impact on the participating educators and organizations. We have gained confidence and developed concrete strategies for addressing controversial topics and challenging questions. We have learned that engaging our audiences’ emotions, values, and beliefs is as important as engaging their intellect. And perhaps most importantly, we learned the power of letting participants define the meaning of their experience.

Rae Ostman is associate research professor and co-director of the Center for Innovation in Informal STEM Learning at Arizona State University in Tempe. **Mitchell Sava** is vice president of innovation and engagement at the Museum of Life and Science in Durham, North Carolina.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Science & Religion project support was provided by the John Templeton Foundation. We extend our thanks to Lee Gutkind, Dan Sarewitz, and Michael Zirulnik for their leadership of the project; to Jenny McCullough Cosgrove of ASU’s University Office of Educational Effectiveness and Evaluation for the program evaluation; and to Jeannie Colton, Emily Hostetler, Stephanie Long, and Darrell Porcello for participating in the program team along with the authors. Finally, we deeply appreciate the opportunity to partner with the project’s fellows and our collaborating partner organizations.

FOR AND BY THE COMMUNITY

An art museum stepped out of its comfort zone to host an exhibition focused on healing in the aftermath of a local tragedy.

By Matthew Welch



Visitors to "Art and Healing" view a cardboard sign stenciled with words of strength, love, and support that was used at the protest at the Minnesota governor's residence.



In May 2017, Valerie Castile left a voicemail on the general line of Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia). She wondered if the museum might be interested in an exhibition of artworks about her son, Philando.

The call was forwarded to the museum's director, Kaywin Feldman, who immediately recognized the name. Philando Castile, a 32-year-old African-American man and beloved member of his community, had been killed by a police officer on July 6, 2016, during a traffic stop—just eight miles from the museum. The aftermath of the shooting—live-streamed by Philando's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds—had gone viral. Protests had rocked Minneapolis and St. Paul in the weeks following the tragedy. Together with the community, Mia staff also grieved. Some attended protests. Others met informally to talk about what happened and to process their feelings.

Feldman returned Valerie Castile's call and found out that in weeks and months following Philando's



death, strangers came to her home to offer condolences and present her with artwork they had created to memorialize Philando. Soon, her walls and tabletops were crowded with these heartfelt expressions. In the depths of her grief, they provided comfort. She marveled that beauty was emerging from the devastation of her son's death. Art was helping her, and she reasoned that the community, too, might find some solace in these works. Would Mia want to offer such an exhibition?

This wasn't something Mia had ever done before. And as an institution that receives public funding, the museum could not take a political stand, especially with the court case against officer Jeronimo Yanez still pending. But, in the end, museum leadership decided to work with community members to hold "Art and Healing: In the Moment." It was the right call.

A Changing Relationship with the Community

In recent years, Mia has focused on becoming more visitor-oriented. We have rewritten every label and panel in the institution to be more engaging and to foreground the intentions of the artist. We have installed Wi-Fi throughout the museum and comfortable seating areas with iPads so that visitors can peruse the collection and view special content about the objects on view. A free membership level has

Valerie Castile in her home with works of art produced in memory of her son, Philando.



removed the financial barrier of joining the museum community.

At the same time, the museum is undertaking projects and exhibitions that increasingly tap into the public zeitgeist. A project organized by artist Andrea Carlson in 2016, "Let: an act of reverse incorporation," offered alternative narratives about objects in the museum's collection through labels authored by community members. It culminated with a procession of artists and community members carrying replicas of objects out of the museum, suggesting that the objects had a "life" beyond the museum context.

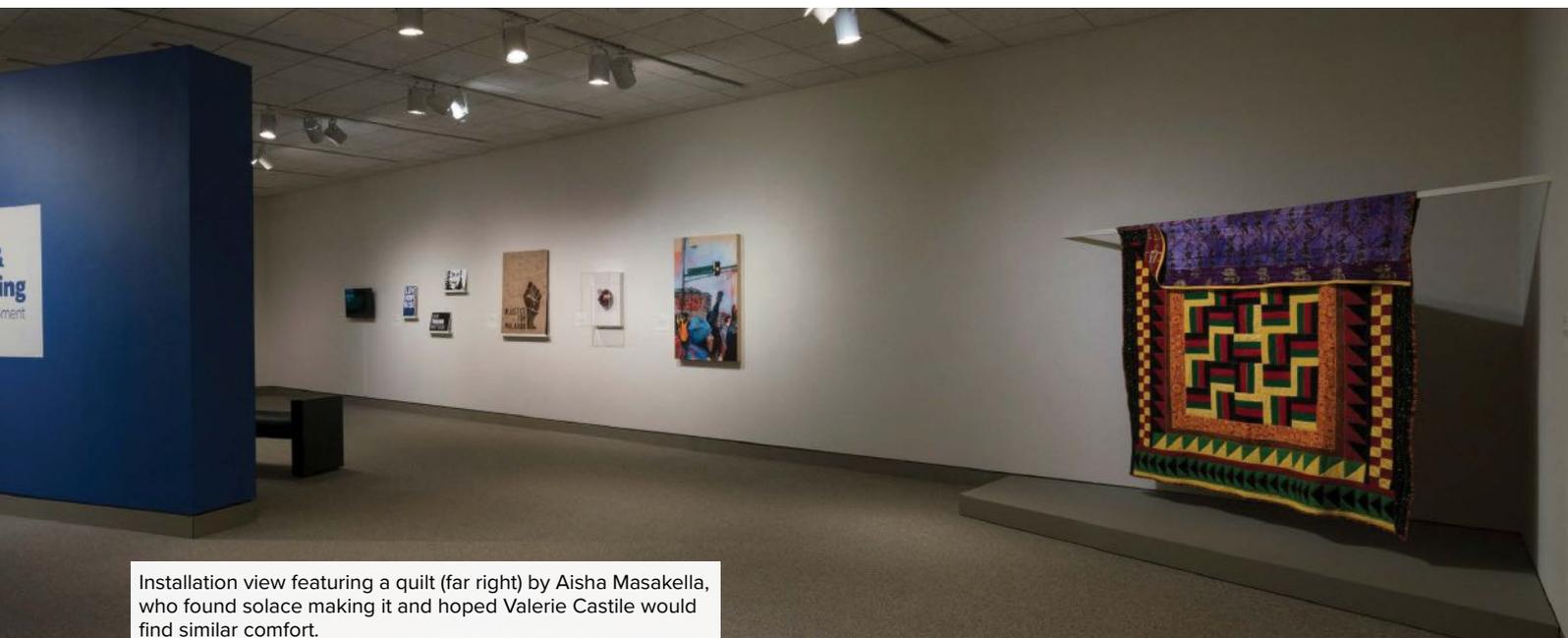
In the summer of 2017, artist-in-residence Aliza Niesenbaum embedded within predominantly Somali and Latino neighborhoods and produced large-scale group portraits that were displayed in the museum. These works empowered participants and visitors alike, providing an expanded sense of museum ownership and belonging.

Through these and many other projects, the community's perception of what the museum is, and who it is for, has slowly transformed. The change has been so palpable that a reporter dubbed Mia "the people's museum." So, when Valerie Castile considered venues for an exhibition of works that honored her son, she thought of Mia.

Why We Needed to Do This

Nonetheless, Feldman's decision to host this exhibition thrust the museum into uncharted territory. The typically long timeline for exhibition planning would need to be shortened, lest the museum seem insensitive to the urgency felt by the Castile family and confirm the perception of museums as detached from real-time concerns. The museum also needed to find a way to authentically present the material without appearing to benefit from this tragedy. In addition,





Installation view featuring a quilt (far right) by Aisha Masakella, who found solace making it and hoped Valerie Castile would find similar comfort.

the museum’s staff felt under-equipped to respond to visitors’ emotional reactions given the senselessness of Philando’s death, the widely circulated video footage of his last moments, and the proximity (in time and space) of the terrible incident.

At the same time, Feldman had to navigate board members’ concerns that the exhibition was beyond the museum’s scope. And some museum colleagues questioned showing works by community-based artists rather than those with established reputations. One museum director said he would not mount such an exhibition because it was “outside of the canon.”

Yet, undertaking the exhibition felt like the right thing to do. In 2016, Mia had launched a three-year initiative known as MASS Action (Museum as Site for Social Action). Participants from museums across the nation came to Minneapolis to discuss the role and responsibility of museums in responding to the issues that affect communities locally and globally. They developed a toolkit of resources, including shared language, strategies to address inequity, and actions and exercises to build more inclusive museum practices.

When Valerie Castile called, the museum was also conducting preliminary discussions about the role

that art might play in fostering empathy. Ultimately, through a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Mia established the Center of Empathy in the Visual Arts, wherein researchers, philosophers, content experts, artists, and thought leaders are grappling with how to make compassion and empathy a part of the museum’s learning strategies with the ultimate goal of fostering positive social change.

Considering these initiatives, walking away from an exhibition that might help the community navigate the pain, grief, and frustration precipitated by the death of Philando Castile seemed disingenuous.

Overcoming the Challenges

Embracing the fact that timeliness was more important than perfection, the museum created space on the exhibition calendar by shifting previously planned shows that were not locked down by contracts. We decided to hold the exhibition June 17 to July 29, 2018.

After meeting with Valerie Castile and making a preliminary selection of works to be included in the exhibition, we convened an advisory group of local community leaders, activists, and trauma counselors

ADDRESSING RACISM AND BIAS

As the Minneapolis Institute of Art planned “Art and Healing: In the Moment,” we learned the following things, which could help any institution looking to tackle issues related to racism and bias.

- **Check your intentions.** Be clear about why you are doing what you are doing, and for whom.
- **Be accountable to your community.** Make sure that those who were or are most impacted by the topic of the exhibition are at the center of planning it. Make decisions collaboratively, and transparently, with community members.
- **Embrace new ways of working.** Co-creation with community groups may require the museum to work in “flatter” (less hierarchical) ways. These new approaches might cause initial discomfort. Lean into that discomfort.
- **Openly address white supremacy.** As a staff, familiarize yourself with the characteristics of white supremacy culture, identify when they emerge, and actively work to develop antidotes against them.
- **Take a restorative approach.** The subject of “Art and Healing” caused harm to our community. Our actions needed to be caring above all. Be humble and show vulnerability.
- **Prepare frontline staff.** Staff will need training on how to bear witness to—and potentially help—visitors who are experiencing pain and reliving trauma.
- **Facilitate processing.** For exhibitions that require processing for both visitors and staff, allocate resources—time, space, money—accordingly.
- **Stay open to feedback.** After the exhibition opens, check in with stakeholders and visitors and be willing to make changes.

to co-create the exhibition with us to ensure that it would encompass multiple perspectives and counteract inherent biases. Working collaboratively, curator Nicole Soukup, Ms. Castile, museum educators and stakeholders, and the advisory group shaped the tenor of the exhibition.

Ultimately, the exhibition focused on the empathic response of the artists, who wanted to comfort Ms. Castile and honor Philando. “Art and Healing: In the Moment” underscored the therapeutic ability of the creative process and art’s role in helping people cope with trauma and loss. This message applied to all museum visitors, but we recognized from the beginning that the exhibition was intended particularly for the African American community—the group most affected by Philando’s loss and that of other African American men due to society’s negative perceptions and biases.

Even at the earliest stages, however, the museum acknowledged that this exhibition was not an indictment of law enforcement. Racism in this country is deep and systemic, but as Ms. Castile said, this does not mean that all police officers are evil; it means that we all need to work harder to acknowledge the impacts of these systems. Conversations with police chiefs in Minneapolis and St. Paul, as well as elected officials, helped amplify the exhibition’s message of recovery and healing in the aftermath of this trauma.

As planning for the exhibition proceeded, it became clear that staff members were struggling with their own feelings about the highly charged nature of the exhibition as well as with how they would effectively help visitors as they relived the pain and trauma. The museum held several discussion groups to help staff better understand the culture of white supremacy and how we might actively work against it. Trauma specialist Resmaa Menakem trained staff on how to respectfully acknowledge a visitor’s grief with humility, self-awareness, and personal vulnerability.

Through these conversations, it became clear that the museum needed to allow the space and time for a range of reactions to the works on view. Some visitors would be motivated to action—to overtly express the emotions the exhibition would evoke. To help them unpack these feelings, we provided a response wall



On the left, three panels where visitors could affix their responses to the exhibition. On the right, two quilts by artists associated with the Million Artist Movement.



with three prompts: “I remember...,” “I feel...,” “In the future I will...” Visitors could affix their notes to the wall for others to read and consider.

For visitors who might want to recover or process more privately, we repurposed a nearby meeting room, outfitting it with soft lighting and comfortable furniture. “Healing ushers” (volunteers trained in trauma response) were positioned in the galleries during high-traffic times to support visitors in distress. Additionally, Mia hired an experienced community facilitator who organized a series of weekly healing circles and discussions on race and representation.

A Community Coming Together

The exhibition, announced largely through social media, opened on June 16, 2018, to hundreds of people. Members of the African American community told us it was cathartic that such an exhibition was taking place at all, let alone within an institution with a long history of perceived, and real, exclusion to them. The mayors of St. Paul (Melvin Carter) and Minneapolis (Jacob Frey) lamented the terrible loss

that Philando’s death represented, but they also exhorted those gathered to work toward positive change as a way of honoring his memory.

A week later, Bryan Stevenson, founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, visited Mia and spoke about the necessity of “getting proximate” to our fellow human beings so that we might better understand and correct the misperceptions that divide us. He also spoke of the vital role that museums and other public institutions might play in furthering this discourse.

For all the fear and apprehension that plagued the planning process, no calamity befell the museum in the weeks that followed the opening. To the contrary, as community members came to the museum, many for the first time, they expressed gratitude that a civic institution was addressing this societal issue. They held us accountable for further exhibitions like this one, asking “What’s next?”

The great collections we hold in public trust will always be a rich source of information about the past, but this small exhibition demonstrated in a very big way that our institutions can play a greater role in the here and now. We need to be open to those opportunities.



Matthew Welch is deputy director and chief curator at the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

STATUES OF LIMITATION

Are museums the rightful home for Confederate monuments?

By Janeen Bryant, Jennifer Scott, and Suzanne Seriff

In the summer of 2017, white supremacists rallied in Charlottesville, Virginia, to protest the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Heather Heyer, a 32-year-old paralegal, was killed by a man who drove his car through a crowd of counter-protesters.

In the wake of that tragedy, newspapers across the nation called for the removal of Confederate monuments from the American public sphere—and their “safe housing” in museums. “What to do with Confederate monuments? Put them in museums as examples of ugly history, not civic pride,” read an *LA Times* headline days after the Charlottesville riots. “Confederate Monuments Belong in Museums, Not Public Squares” stated a *Weekly Standard* headline on August 20, 2017.

In just over a year and a half, more than four dozen Confederate monuments in at least 27 cities across the US have, in fact, been removed, pulled down, “retired,” spray painted, chiseled, written on, or otherwise

physically altered (what some have described as “vandalized”), resulting in their official “safekeeping” in warehouses, research centers, cemeteries, and other sometimes unidentified spaces throughout the urban landscape.

Many of these monuments have made their way to museum cold-storage spaces; a smaller number have spawned new displays on museum exhibition floors. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has even proposed constructing an entirely new museum just to house the recently toppled “Silent Sam” statue that stood for decades on the main campus lawn. However, a number of history museums—including the Smithsonian—have out-and-out refused to take a Confederate statue, citing everything from the logistical challenges to the high cost to the misalignment with their missions.

But the debate about what to do with these monuments is far from over. In fact, the American Association for State and Local History recently

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“For years, the echoing silence from mainstream museums was a frustrating reminder that most staff were unwilling or unable to confront racist monuments, racist artifacts, or racism in any form.”



Copy photograph of the dedication of the Robert E. Lee monument at Lee Circle, 1884, New Orleans, Louisiana.

released a guide for museum professionals, public historians, and community leaders on how to navigate the issue. Yet no “how-to” manual can supply an easy solution to this extremely complex issue. Many museums continue to grapple with what role they should, could, or must play in the storing or displaying of these gigantic “homages”—artifacts not even of the Civil War itself, but of the Jim Crow movements that fueled their commissioning and erection in prominent public places in the early 20th century.

Jefferson Davis at the University of Texas

The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin is an oft-cited example of an institution that has taken a definitive step in dealing with this issue. The museum agreed to house an 8 ½-foot-tall, 2,000-pound statue of Jefferson Davis, former president of the Confederacy, that was removed from the campus’ South Mall in 2015.

“I think this is the answer,” said Don Carleton, the center’s executive director, in an August 18, 2017, *USA Today* article that is pointedly titled “When a bronze Confederate needed to retire, University of Texas found a home.” He continued, “They are pieces of art; destroying that is like burning books. They need to be preserved and they belong in museums.”

He added that the center will not “be putting him in our building as some sort of shrine to Jefferson Davis, but as an educational experience and point of discussion.” The permanent exhibition “From Commemoration to Education” tells how the statue came to be and why it was later removed from its original spot on campus. According to the exhibition’s curator, Ben Wright, in the same story, “the presence of the statue in an educational exhibition, as opposed to a place of honor, underlines that Davis, as well as his ideas and actions, are no longer commemorated by the university.”

Yet some students, Austin citizens, and concerned museum-goers complain that the exhibition continues to glorify the statue because of the inherent value conferred on objects in a museum. In addition, they note, statues appear even more monumental when squeezed into a standard museum hallway space. No matter how sensitively museums contextualize the artifacts themselves, does their larger-than-life

presence in an enclosed exhibition space mitigate, or even parody, any interpretive value?

Confronting the Racism

A growing number of museum professionals—especially professionals of color and their allies—are increasingly cautioning that the “put them in a museum” response to Confederate memorials, no matter how sensitively stated, reflects a larger misunderstanding of what museums are for.

In addition, simply housing these monuments in museums sidesteps important questions that we need to ask in our communities and within our own institutions: Who are the “stakeholders” who are being brought to—or remain absent from—the table in these conversations about Confederate statues, and what is the role of “professionals” in the process? Do we trust that curators and museum personnel have the right stuff to lead the charge? Who will be the arbiters and decision makers in the meaning-making process? And how is this process limited—or framed—by the starting assumption that the monuments must be preserved in the public sphere?

Anti-racism educator and historian Ibram Kendi reflected on his youth in Manassas, Virginia, and the meaning of Confederate monuments during the keynote speech at the March 3, 2018, symposium “Mascots, Myths, Monuments and Memory” at the National Museum of African American History and Culture:

In thinking through my comments for today, I tried to really understand, first and foremost, how it felt for me, how it feels for so many of us to live day in and day out surrounded by so many Confederate monuments. How does it feel for those people that have to literally watch people cheer for mascots that are a desecration of their people? How does it feel to see myths memorialized in public squares, in massive stadiums? And more importantly, what do these feelings say about our memories and our histories, let alone the memories of the defenders of these monuments and mascots?



Canal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

For years, the echoing silence from mainstream museums was a frustrating reminder that most staff were unwilling or unable to confront racist monuments, racist artifacts, or racism in any form. As museum professionals, we must be willing to create intellectually active spaces wherever we gather—in workshops, at conferences, in staff break rooms, and in our communities’ public spaces—to grapple with the overt assumptions surrounding these monuments.

Christy Coleman, CEO of the American Civil War Museum in Richmond, Virginia—a city once the seat of the Confederacy—was asked to co-chair Richmond’s Monument Avenue Commission to help bridge the different perspectives in her community on the fate of five Confederate monuments along one of the city’s main boulevards. She helped implement a groundbreaking community engagement process.

From July 2017 to May 2018, the commission solicited extensive community input about these monuments through emails, letters, and public forums. In the end, the final report (see Resources on p. 50 for a link) captures the nuanced ways in which people encounter the monuments and their yearning for more context, new possibilities, and alternative options for memorialization.

As museum professionals, we must formulate our own approach to where, whether, and how to re-contextualize these toppled monuments to our Jim Crow past. In doing so, we must recognize our own histories of complicity in the centering of white, male, hetero-normative heritages and the celebration of icons of white supremacy. We must also acknowledge that,

over the generations, communities of color and other marginalized groups have tirelessly contested these narratives and fought for their rightful place in history.

Recognizing Black Activism

Before the Richmond initiative, in 2015 the New Orleans City Council voted to remove all of its Confederate statues from city parks. The successful Take 'Em Down movement in New Orleans was the direct result of grassroots community activism led by black organizers.

To emphasize this history is all the more crucial given that most media coverage attributed the removals to the open-mindedness and forward thinking of Mitch Landrieu, New Orleans mayor at the time. The media lauded his speech and unprecedented action rather than acknowledging the black leadership that truly and thoughtfully catalyzed these changes.

By November 2014, black activists from BYP100 NOLA had already issued a petition for the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue. And as early as the 1970s, long-time activist Malcolm Suber had been calling for the removal of all white supremacist symbols, which resulted in the renaming of more than 30 schools in the 1990s. Yet this sustained activism has been rendered invisible.

A broader conversation about museums and monuments must include not only a recognition of the landscapes of oppression that the Confederate statues mark, but also an understanding of the self-determined landscapes of resistance that marginalized communities have created to mark their own histories, in opposition to, but also in spite of, these erasures.

Museo Urbano in El Paso, Texas; Pauli Murray Center in Durham, North Carolina; Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago; Weeksville Heritage Center in New York; the Abbe Museum in Maine; and the recently opened National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration in Montgomery, Alabama, are examples of “bottom-up” museums that are de-centering white supremacist narratives, centering marginalized histories and social justice, modeling innovative approaches to inclusion, and redefining memorials and monuments.

For example, the sole mission of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice is to examine the lasting legacy of lynching in the United States. The sheer scale of the memorial, strategically set atop a hill near downtown Montgomery, Alabama, with hundreds of six-foot-tall oxidizing iron columns, creates another form of canonization. Thousands of names have been carefully inscribed into the metal faces, boldly proclaiming a history that was deliberately silenced and largely erased but is now creating a new paradigm for what constitutes a Southern “narrative.”

Bryan Stevenson, founder of the memorial and the neighboring Legacy Museum, insists that such a monumental recognition of our nation's racist past is a necessary corrective to the museums and public history initiatives that have failed us by rushing headlong into memorialization instead of confronting our American history of exclusion and selective representation.

RESOURCES

An earlier version of this article (by Bryant, Scott, Seriff, and including co-authors Benjamin Filene and Louis Nelson) ran on AAM's Center for the Future of Museums blog and on Smithsonian.com.

aam-us.org/2018/04/03/are-museums-the-rightful-home-for-confederate-monuments/bit.ly/2VEzmi5

Controversial Monuments and Memorials: A Guide for Community Leaders, David B. Allison (ed.), 2018

Monument Avenue Commission Report, prepared for the Office of the Mayor and City Council, City of Richmond, Virginia, 2018

bit.ly/2MJ3wzf

Take 'Em Down NOLA Movement
takeemdownnola.org

“How Robert E. Lee Got Knocked Off His Pedestal,” Brentin Mock, CityLab, May 29, 2017

bit.ly/2LW0gfi

Princeton & Slavery
slavery.princeton.edu/stories/princeton-and-slavery-holding-the-center

“Princeton Confronts Its Slave-Owning Past With An ‘Anti-Monument,’” Priscilla Frank, HuffPost, Nov. 28, 2017

bit.ly/2SFmxSQ



Titus Kaphar's anti-monument, *Impressions of Liberty* (2017), was placed in front of the old president's residence on the Princeton campus.

The Anti-Monument Movement

We are beginning to see museums, universities, and public institutions support what some have called the “anti-monument.” These are sculptures, interventions, or tributes that bring to the fore contested histories and question how and why we memorialize people and legacies.

A great anti-monument example is Titus Kaphar's work for the Princeton & Slavery Project at Princeton University. His sculpture *Impressions of Liberty*, part of his *Monumental Inversions* series, was positioned for part of 2017 in front of the original Princeton president's house (now the alumni association building). The artwork includes a recognizable regal silhouette in the form of a wooden carving of former Princeton President Samuel Finley and, within his shadow, a depiction of a man, woman, and child that Finley owned and enslaved.

“Monuments are often erected to memorialize fallen heroes or otherwise reinforce a particular idea of the past,” said James Christen Steward, the director of the university's art museum, in a HuffPost article.

“In that light, I think Titus Kaphar's work is more ‘anti-monument,’ drawing our attention to forgotten histories and to the idea that history itself is being constantly rewritten. It is that understanding of history as fluid (and as a tale of both who is depicted and who is omitted) that indeed drew us to his work.”

No matter how museums ultimately come down on the Confederate monument debate, we believe that these and other public institutions of education and power must critically examine their own histories of exclusion and any continued complicities in what they monumentalize before they earn the right to properly contextualize racist memorials.

As artist Nayland Blake recently stated, “Museums need to decide whether or not they are active participants in the life of their city or if they are just some kind of trophy house.”

Janeen Bryant is principal consultant at Facilitate Movement; **Jennifer Scott** is the director and chief curator of Jane Addams Hull-House Museum at the University of Illinois at Chicago; and **Suzanne Seriff** is an independent museum curator and senior lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin.



Every July, thousands of West African Mourides, a Muslim group founded in Senegal, gather in New York City for the Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Day parade. Men, women, and children dressed in some of their finest outfits march up Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard from 110th Street to 125th Street.

"I always liked to look different. I make my style unique. The Daouda who comes from Senegal is a tailor of tallors in Senegal. He teaches me how to sew and design, and I love it even more!"
Seyssabou (Habib) Beck
Manville Fashion, Brooklyn, NYC

"I learned to sew, embroider, tie-dye in Senegal. My father and I are often the men who take the cotton and the women who take the beautiful colors and pattern and sell it in the market."
Daouda (David) Dioume
Manville Fashion, Brooklyn, NYC

Wrap these West African fabrics around yourself or a friend to create a unique outfit!

A girl plays in the New York City–Senegalese fashion stall in the exhibition's Marketplace area, which also features Indonesian fruits, Zanzibari fish, Turkish ceramics, Egyptian spices, Moroccan rugs, and a Tajik teahouse.



A GLOBAL EDUCATION FOR ALL

The Children's
Museum of
Manhattan
successfully
navigated
potential backlash
in developing
an exhibition on
Muslim cultures.

By Lizzy Martin

Many museums across the globe

face the same challenge: creating exhibitions that offer opportunities to expand visitors' ever-developing sense of self, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

With "America to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far," a 2,500-square-foot immersive and interactive exhibition that explores the diversity of Muslim cultures around the world, the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) had the additional challenges of accurately representing the beauty and wonder of

the cultural expressions and daily life of more than 1.6 billion people in one exhibition, while engaging both children and adults.

After seven years of planning, the exhibition opened in 2016 with the goal of advancing public understanding and knowledge of local Muslim cultures in the greater context of world cultures, past and present. CMOM had never before developed an exhibition that presented multiple cultures linked by a single religion.

Adding to this challenge, the exhibition was potentially contentious because, unfortunately, some conflate Islam with terrorism, even though, according to a 2014 US State Department estimate, only 1/8 of 1/100th of 1 percent of Muslims globally are suspected of having links to terrorist organizations.

Nonetheless, CMOM needed to carefully navigate this reality and global events, which meant managing the exhibition messaging to appeal to a diverse public and elevating the discourse about the exhibition beyond rhetoric and sensationalism. CMOM also needed to avoid becoming a political tool of interest groups with an agenda contrary to the museum's.

The complexity of these issues, along with the diversity of the cultures and the range of potentially concerned stakeholders, called for a multifaceted plan to achieve our educational goals. In creating and executing that plan, the museum learned the following key lessons.

Cultivate extensive community input to ensure accuracy and support.

The content available for the exhibition's several narratives was expansive, spanning different people and places over thousands of years. The exhibit development team cultivated partnerships to inform and advise on all elements of the project, from the colors, logo, text, activities, and design to the selection of the individuals and cultures included. Our partners included academics, religious scholars, families, interfaith leaders, local community leaders, designers, architects, artists, musicians, international political advisors and notables, the United Nations missions in New York and Washington, DC, and partner institutions such as the Asia Society and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Finding key lead advisors who knew the cultural landscape and the academic and faith circles was essential to the project's success. In 2009, we met with our first cultural advisor, Zeyba Rahman. In 2014, we met Hussein Rashid, a lead advisor throughout the project. As a Muslim, an Islamic studies scholar, a father, a pop culture and graphic novel expert, a New Yorker, and a well-connected community member, Rashid was an invaluable guide. He helped the exhibit development team form the content, conducted research, reviewed material, coordinated meetings, and introduced us to experts.

Rely on the museum's mission to define strengths and limits.

Staff and advisors agreed that the exhibition's purpose was not to educate about Islam, explain the doctrines or religious practices of Muslims, or assume that we could change attitudes about a religion. Instead, our goal was to showcase and celebrate the cultural diversity of those who self-identify as Muslim.

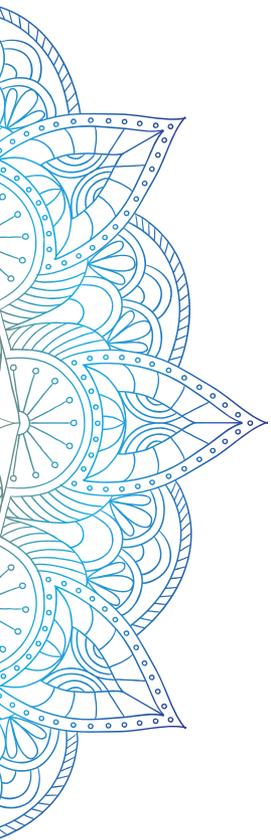
However, we wanted to ensure that visitors had a baseline, and accurate, understanding of who a Muslim is. So the advisors helped us craft an introductory definition of Islam, which appears on the entry panel:

A Muslim is someone who follows the religion of Islam. In Islam there is only one God, called Allah. The holy book of Islam is the Qur'an, believed to be the word of God as it was revealed in Arabic to the prophet Muhammad. Muhammad was born around 570 A.D. in the city of Mecca, now in Saudi Arabia. There are approximately 1.6 billion Muslims in the world today.

While this was the museum's only interpretive text specifically about Islam, the exhibition presented hundreds of individual Muslim perspectives and cultural expressions.

Use universal themes for specific and diverse cultural moments.

The exhibition is organized by themes found throughout Muslim cultures that were accessible to all families, including *travel and trade*, *architecture*, *marketplaces*, *American homes*, and *courtyards*. The





Hundreds of Muslim voices and cultures are represented throughout the exhibition.

3 REASONS TO PROCEED

Andrew Ackerman, executive director of the Children’s Museum of Manhattan (CMOM), shares why he was resolved to create the “America to Zanzibar” exhibition during tumultuous times.

It was the right thing to do from a societal and an educational perspective. One in 12 New York City public school students, and more than 1.6 billion people worldwide, identify as Muslim. We determined that it was vitally important for these children to see themselves, and for non-Muslim children to see their neighbors, reflected in a mainstream cultural institution.

An exhibition on Muslim cultures had never been done for a family audience. CMOM is known for taking risks; however, this was the first time we used the practice of a worldwide religion, Islam, as the common denominator by which to explore and celebrate diverse countries, cultures, and customs.

The board of directors was always supportive. The risks inherent in the project were myriad: a potential boycott or, worse, targeted violence; inaccurately or insufficiently representing particular Muslim cultures; other religious communities feeling slighted that we weren’t focusing on their belief systems and cultures; or the misperception that we were trying to “brainwash” our young visitors. Nevertheless, when you believe in a vision, you find a way to bring it to life. Our board of directors was fully committed to this exhibition and was the source of initial funding.

exhibits team matched past and present Muslim cultural expressions and stories with opportunities for families to explore the activities through interactive, child-friendly experiences: playing dress-up, driving a truck, sailing on a boat, pretending to fish. Offering visitors the opportunity to engage with sights, sounds, smells, first-person quotes, structures, and designs was a priority. Such activities also invite adults to learn new information and revisit preconceptions in a nonjudgmental environment.

The exhibit development team, along with the advisors, worked for years to gather ideas, stories, and content. In a Harlem market, the team met and discussed Senegalese patterns with a skilled Muslim tailor who had left Senegal to train in France and now works in New York City. An Egyptian artist in Astoria, Queens, hand-sculpted the exhibition’s popular,

lifelike, climb-aboard camel. The developers tasted avocado coffee at an Indonesian café downtown while recording the owner’s voice for the exhibition-related app through which children can learn to write and say “My name is” in the more than 20 languages spoken by Muslim New Yorkers. This is just a small sampling of those the team engaged with to ensure we accurately represented a diversity of communities.

Feature first-person voices, authentic objects, and contemporary art.

The exhibition incorporates contemporary and historical art and objects from individuals and cultures. The American home area features stories, voices, personal objects, and artifacts on loan from 14 local Muslims, including an African American historian, a Turkish American museum educator, an East-Indian





In the Central Courtyard, families enjoy ANIKAYA Dance Theater's Wendy Jehlen in a patterned costume by Egyptian-American artist Basil El Halwagy.

American mayor, and a Nuyorican (New York Puerto Rican) hip-hop artist. The displays offer glimpses of personal and religious similarities and differences through toys, books, clothes, songs, prayer beads, a gavel, golf clubs, slippers, and more.

Partner institutions and private collectors loaned objects to complement the designed environments and experiences. Object cases featured items from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Muhammad

Ali Center, the Hispanic Society Library & Museum of New York, Moroccan rug weavers, the Turkish Consulate, and the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center.

We paired the exhibition with the American Muslim Artist Series, which featured local and contemporary designers, painters, dancers, and photographers. For example, visitors could experience an American-Senegalese Muslim painter's work adjacent to the NYC-Senegalese fashion stall or compare the patterns on the Met's centuries-old Iranian tiles with the contemporary patterns seen in a photo of a dancer's costume.

Study the landscape of dissenters and prepare a strategy for managing controversy.

Throughout the exhibition development process, negative associations with the words "Islam" and "Muslim" increased in the media. The exhibition team was nervous at times, but CMOM's executive director, Andrew Ackerman, and the board of trustees were resolved to proceed. The museum has always wanted to offer children, and families, safe spaces to positively construct their cultural understandings. Children witnessing negative attitudes might use those as norms for interacting with others if they aren't presented with different perspectives.

CMOM engaged BoomGen, a firm with unique expertise in public discourse about Muslims in America, to help create a multifaceted strategy to study the broader landscape of potential supporters and dissenters. BoomGen also provided counsel on public relations, marketing, institution-wide messaging, and how to handle controversy.

Manage content and framing that could cause backlash.

The approach to culture in "America to Zanzibar" is inspired by the diversity of New York City and the United States. Therefore, "America" is first in the title, followed by "Zanzibar," a majority Muslim culture. The title highlights the "travel around the world" concept by adapting the familiar "from A to Z" phrase.

With the social climate as it was, the team debated whether to include the tagline "Muslim Cultures Near and Far." Using the word "Muslim" risked potential

unnecessary negative attention. In the end, we included the tagline to publicly state the institution's support for Muslim cultures.

In anticipation of questions about the project, the advisors helped develop thoughtful, easy-to-understand talking points. The exhibits team held informational training sessions for the entire institution to help everyone, from maintenance staff to museum educators, understand and be comfortable with the content and the institutional intent behind the project. Muslim scholars answered questions about Islam and international cultures and practices. In an abundance of caution, the museum briefed the New York Police Department (NYPD) on the project and hosted an NYPD safety training for the staff. Responses to frequently asked questions—which, among other things, covered why the museum decided to focus on Muslims and not 9/11 and terrorism—were disseminated, reviewed, and kept at the admissions desk.

In preparation for press interviews, the senior staff attended an off-site media training, which helped them develop compelling personal stories about their experience working on “America to Zanzibar.” Staff members also practiced redirecting tough questions to ensure they could maintain control of the story. This helped the team feel more empowered when engaging with all stakeholders, regardless of their intentions or questions.

Celebrate and share successes.

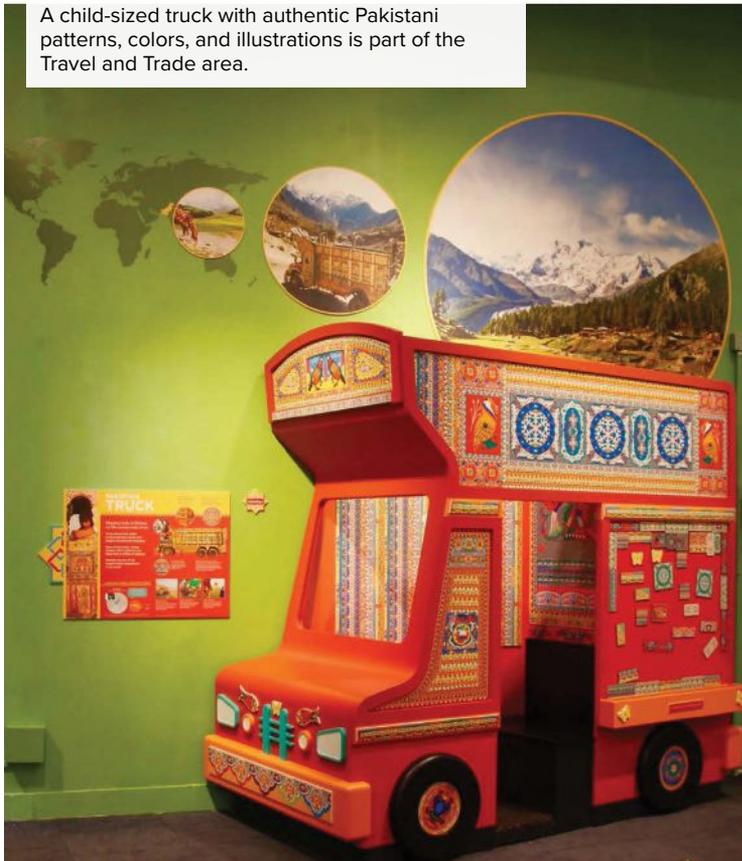
The exhibition opened in 2016 to wide acclaim and interest from national and international news sources, museum professionals, and the public. It received positive attention from *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, Al Jazeera, Fox, WNBC, Aramco, Breitbart, and the *Washington Post*, to name a few. The Guides Association of New York City nominated it for Outstanding Achievement in NYC Museum Exhibitions.

“America to Zanzibar” is currently traveling the US, including Philadelphia, Chattanooga, Louisville, and Chicago, with more cities to come. Though initially no one wanted to rent it, we had designed the exhibition to be able to travel. It's a good thing we did.

Without a doubt, developing “America to Zanzibar” was a complex process. But it was all worthwhile every time we observed a global tea party in the exhibition's marketplace—a group of multicultural children, wrapped and styled in Senegalese fabrics, serving Zanzibari fish with Egyptian spices on Turkish plates at the Tajikistan teahouse table. They readily accepted the diversity.

Lizzy Martin is the director of exhibition development and museum planning at the Children's Museum of Manhattan in New York.

A child-sized truck with authentic Pakistani patterns, colors, and illustrations is part of the Travel and Trade area.





By Svetlana Mintcheva

In Polarized Times

How can museums better respond when caught in the crosshairs of socio-political debate?

In 2016, an already polarized nation acquired a polarizing president. The art world, among other parts of society, erupted.

A young cohort of artist activists began demanding that cultural institutions respond to deep social grievances: racism, discrimination, and gender and social inequalities. Some of these artist activists began to abandon principles of free speech in the service of advancing social justice.

The defining controversy of this new era arose with Dana Schutz's painting of Emmett Till, based on the iconic 1955 photograph of the 14-year-old's tortured body in its casket. Schutz's work was included in the 2017 Whitney Biennial along with many other works on race-related issues—a timely focus given the national conversation about police violence against black men.

TURN CONTROVERSY INTO ENGAGEMENT

Museum professionals considering potentially controversial subject matter are wise to ask themselves the following questions.

- Do I fully understand my institution's social, political, and economic context?
- Who are the stakeholders in the community with whom I need to nurture long-term relationships?
- What outside groups can we work with to help us frame this exhibition or program—and serve as educational consultants and advocates?
- How will we prepare all museum staff to deal with any controversy or tough questions?
- What is the plan to monitor social media and decide what needs addressing and what can be left alone?
- If there is controversy, who will be my allies in the community and nationwide?
- Is the institution prepared to host an in-person discussion on potentially sensitive questions? Should we pre-plan this discussion before opening the show?
- How will the institution respond to threats of violence?

Schutz's painting provoked a firestorm of calls for removal and destruction: it was painted by a white woman, it "appropriated" a painful history that did not belong to her, it retraumatized viewers, it appeared as another instance of white profit from black pain.

The Whitney was caught unprepared. As articles flooded the press and debates filled social media, the institution remained silent while feverishly figuring out how to respond. A week after the controversy broke—an eternity in today's news cycle—the

Whitney announced a public conversation organized and hosted by poet Claudia Rankine, founder of the Racial Imaginary Institute. Hundreds participated, and without necessarily converting anyone, the event succeeded in diffusing tension. The Whitney administration listened to and welcomed opposing viewpoints in its space, but it was also clear that the work would stay.

Content relating to the history of racism or ethnic violence in America, no matter the intention of the artist, is almost always disturbing. Today we are facing new questions about such content: Do white artists have the right to use that disturbing material? Do reminders of painful history only perpetuate historical trauma? Are museums further demonstrating their structural racism by displaying material that is deeply disturbing for traditionally oppressed groups? If they want to be both relevant and committed to social justice and diversity, shouldn't museums consider their programming through an ethical lens sensitized to the concerns of minority groups?

The answers to those questions often prompt calls for the removal of artwork that discomforts or causes anger, and leads to self-censorship by curators, museum directors, or college presidents. What if, instead, museums became prepared risk takers?

Institutions Under Pressure

The relatively new pressures to remove art touching on traumatic histories are accompanied by the new pressure tactics that social media offers. Groups protesting an exhibition can rally large numbers of online supporters, making it appear that an institution is facing massive opposition. Social media also makes threats of violence easy to issue and hard to track. And, of course, museums continue to face the regular political, community, and financial pressures that come with preparing an exhibition.

The Arts Advocacy Project at the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) conducted a survey on the pressures art institutions face to modify content and how they negotiate them.

In theory, the field overwhelmingly subscribes to former museum director and curator Kathy Halbreich's fortuitous aphorism, "Museums should be safe spaces for unsafe ideas," as well as to

“The relatively new pressures to remove art touching on traumatic histories are accompanied by the new pressure tactics that social media offers.”

museum mission staples like “democratic dialogue” or “open-ended conversations.”

In practice, however, those ideals do not always survive. Over a third of the museum professionals we surveyed expressed some doubt that museums are indeed the appropriate place to address difficult subject matter.

For every exhibition, decisions are made about what to show and what not to show. One survey respondent told us, “You have to make a decision: Is the work important enough? Is it at the heart of your mission and therefore worth it to take on controversy? Sometimes the answer is yes and sometimes it’s no.”

Lisa Freiman, former director of Virginia Commonwealth University’s Institute for Contemporary Art, confirmed this practice. “Self-censorship is one of the main things we encounter in museums because we are thinking of what potentially can go wrong; there is no question that people do censor themselves,” she says. “The past years in the art world and on university campuses have given many administrators pause about weighing the integrity of programming against the possibility of public outcry.”

In the US today, the openness of the cultural field is more affected by the agility with which curators and museum directors navigate internal and external pressures than the threat of government censorship. Curatorial and museum administration programs don’t offer courses on negotiating controversy in a polarized environment. They should.

Preparing to Show Difficult Content

NCAC’s direct intervention work and survey of practitioners have revealed practical tactics for managing controversy. Rather than provide advice on how to avoid controversy, we offer ways to turn potentially damaging controversy into productive engagement.

Preparing to display sensitive content needs to start long before a show is even conceived. Curators and museum administrators need to create and nurture networks of support within both the institution and the local community, and they must be well-versed in the institution’s social, political, and economic context.

A racially sensitive project, for instance, can be successful when the right supporters and collaborators are involved. In a 2018 project involving a performance and installation featuring the “lynching” of a Confederate flag at Ohio University’s Kennedy Museum of Art, the artist John Sims overcame fear and opposition. After years of trying to stage the work, he succeeded by mobilizing the university’s Black Student Cultural Programming Board, Multicultural Center, and Department of African American Studies; off-campus community groups including Black Life Action Coalition, United Campus Ministry, and Appalachian Peace and Justice Network, among many others; and the NCAC’s Arts Advocacy Project.

Presenting sensitive content also requires deep familiarity with an institution’s local, social, political, and economic context, including an awareness of key political actors, local special-interest groups, and social tensions. This can be particularly challenging today, as museum professionals tend to be nationally and internationally mobile, which can hinder their understanding of an institution’s local environment.



SMART TACTICS: Curating Difficult Content by the Arts Advocacy Project at the National Coalition Against Censorship, 2018

ncac.org/category/resource



Huang Yong Ping's *Theater of the World* (1993) and *The Bridge* (1995) presented devoid of living animals at "Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World" at New York's Guggenheim Museum in 2017.



Huang Yong Ping's statement, written on an airplane bag on September 30, 2017, in response to the controversy surrounding the Guggenheim's presentation of the artist's *Theater of the World*.

In 2016, the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis experienced controversy over an exhibition featuring a white artist's use of imagery from African American magazines. Both the curator and museum director had recently moved from the West Coast to this Midwestern city where racial tensions were high.

Outreach to local stakeholders—both within the museum and in the community—needs to precede a show. Such partnerships can help define educational programs and framing, send the message that the institution is listening, and offer knowledgeable and credible outside advocates for the show if controversy arises.

The key factor determining reception, especially when an exhibition deals with sensitive subject matter, is the framing and contextualization of the work. Framing includes title, arrangement, wall texts, and catalogues and involves the curatorial, education, and publicity departments. In a broader sense, framing also includes the preparation of everybody within the institution, from museum guards to

trustees, to be comfortable talking about the show's controversial aspects.

Increasingly, exhibitions are also framed by the social media publicity around them. Such publicity can have major—positive or negative—impact. Controversy erupted in 2015 around cultural appropriation and orientalism in a program the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston called "Flirting with the Exotic." The program invited visitors to don replica kimonos while standing before Claude Monet's *La Japonaise*. The sensationalizing title triggered the controversy.

With social media, information targeted at art audiences easily spreads to online special-interest groups and other unexpected participants from different discursive backgrounds. Decontextualized components of a show can quickly circulate and fuel activist agendas. Some of these campaigns can be ignored; some need to be addressed.

Responding to Protests

When online activism reaches a crescendo, it can be helpful to organize a face-to-face event where

Courtesy of the artist; photo by David Heald © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2017



Theater of the World (1993) and *The Bridge* (1995) as intended to be shown at the exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in 2018.

grievances can be aired and different positions heard. The conversation around Dana Schutz’s work at the Whitney Biennial, for example, helped diffuse tensions. While disagreement is likely to persist, the voices of protestors will be heard as part of a diversity of voices and competing demands, thus overcoming the stand-off between the institution and protesters.

Conversation, however, is not an option when an institution is threatened with violence. Such threats are more and more frequent worldwide and often succeed in suppressing work. In 2017, claiming it had received “repeated threats of violence” from animal rights activists over its exhibition “Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World,” New York’s Guggenheim Museum modified one work and presented blank video screens where two others were to be shown.

When faced with such threats, should a museum opt out of opening a show, cancel a show, or remove the offending work? Or should the institution disregard threats and potentially put audiences and staff

at risk? These questions require careful evaluation and risk assessment. Before capitulating to threats of violence, cultural institutions need to enlist security departments, police, and the FBI to evaluate the seriousness of violent threats and offer options for ensuring safety.

Cultural institutions today are eager to be key players in conversations about social justice, politics, the environment, and our shared future. This is a welcome development. Cultural institutions can provide unique and necessary space for discussion and understanding.

But even as cultural institutions provide a “safe space for unsafe ideas,” they are themselves exposed to pressures and risks. To lead those institutions, we need well-prepared risk takers.

Svetlana Mintcheva is the director of programs for the National Coalition Against Censorship.

REFLECTION



*Of the terrible doubt of appearances,
Of the uncertainty after all, that we may be deluded,
That may-be reliance and hope are but speculations after all,
That may-be identity beyond the grave is a beautiful fable only,
May-be the things I perceive, the animals, plants, men, hills,
shining and flowing waters,
The skies of day and night, colors, densities, forms, may-be these
are (as doubtless they are) only apparitions, and the real
something has yet to be known*

From *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman

CHRIS ENGMAN *REFUGE*, 2016 pigment print; 43 x 53 inches; edition of 6 courtesy of Greg Kucera Gallery

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