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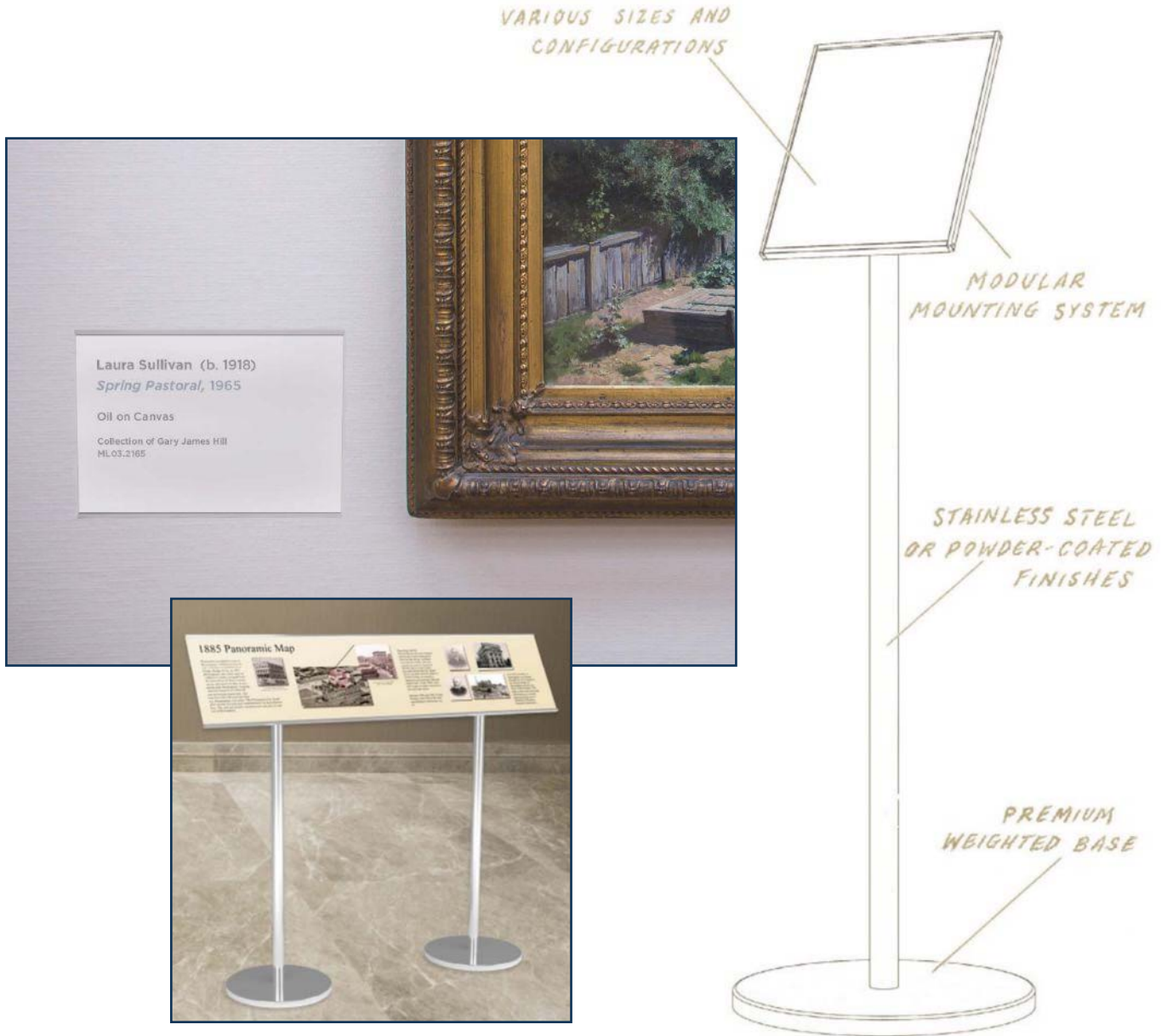
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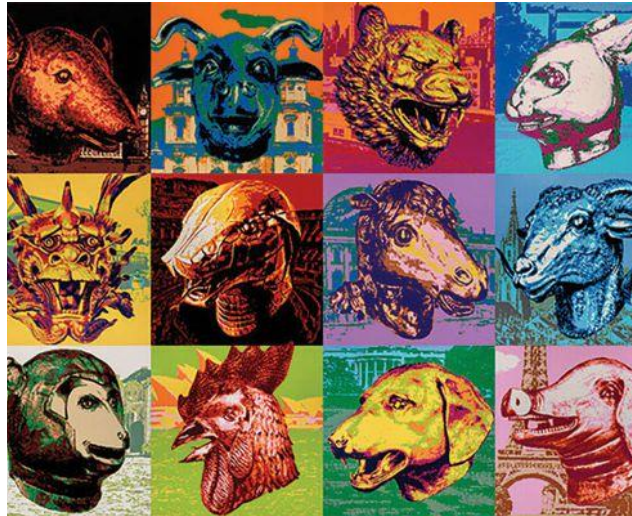
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New Year, New Resources for Museum Professionals



NEW

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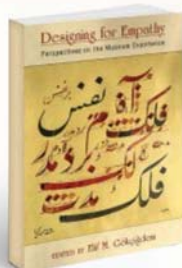
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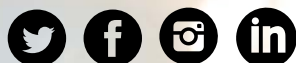


Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion in Museums

Edited by Johnnetta Betsch Cole and
Laura L. Lott

Thought leaders in the museum field contemplate the field's struggles with diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. For the first time, these watershed essays, keynote addresses, and data are gathered in one resource, so we can learn from recent history and build on these leaders' work in the next decade.

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Thank You for Your Thought Leadership

Four years ago, Alliance members helped inform a five-year strategic plan that called for bold new approaches to tackle some of the most critical opportunities and challenges facing the museum field.

As we enter the final year of that strategic plan, 2020 is the perfect time to evaluate and reflect on our accomplishments and decide how to build on our momentum in the years to come.

Two of the goals in that strategic plan were to expand thought leadership and access to relevant content. A thought leader is an “expert whose views on a subject matter are important and have a strong influence,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary. We know Alliance members are not only experts in various aspects of museum work; you are also well-positioned to influence others. And if the Alliance could provide platforms for sharing your experiences and expertise, together we could strengthen the museum field and inspire action among museums in key areas.

Thanks to you and the power of the Alliance, in the past few years we have hosted dozens of workshops, convenings, web-based events, and even a road trip to explore a range of topics. We have delved into museums’ role in an evolving P–12 education ecosystem; changing business models for financial sustainability; diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion; interventions in deaccessioning crises; the future of historic houses; emerging technologies; self-care; and much more.

Alliance members’ thought leadership stretches globally, thanks to our new online platform and content strategy. Our goal was to create an inclusive space that connects colleagues and thought partners across the globe, a stage for field-wide debate, an amplifier for voices not often heard, and a toolbox to equip your

work. Our website is home to more than 500 articles by museum professionals from around the world, reaching nearly 200,000 people in the past year. Increasingly, you will find toolkits and other turnkey resources to help you do your job better at every stage of your career.

The popular annual publication *TrendsWatch*, from the Alliance’s Center for the Future of Museums, is now experimenting with more interactive ways to prepare for your museum’s future, including videos and discussion guides. And let’s not forget the insightful, in-depth ideas and analysis presented on the pages of the reimagined *Museum* magazine. You can enjoy all this content by regularly visiting our website or by signing up for our recently launched open-access newsletter *Field Notes*, which highlights new stories and insights from the Alliance blog each week.

Your tremendous response to this call for thought leadership has exceeded our expectations, and we cannot thank you enough. We are a stronger Alliance thanks to the hundreds of you who have already contributed your experience and insights. Of course, we always welcome new authors and inspiration across our platforms. To share your story or a resource that has helped you do your job better, contact our content team at content@aam-us.org.

I look forward to updating you on more of our strategic-plan accomplishments throughout the year, continuing to grow with you in 2020, and finding out what the future will hold.



Laura L. Lott is the Alliance’s president and CEO. Follow Laura on Twitter at [@LottLaura](https://twitter.com/LottLaura).

Curatorial Practice

+14%
BY THE
NUMBERS

Projected growth
in number of
curators from
2016–2026

3/4
BY THE
NUMBERS

of regular
museum-goers*
specifically
want to see
original objects
when visiting a
museum.

* "Museum-goers" means
individuals who visit
museums regularly, typically
three or more times per year.

74% vs. 47%
Almost 3/4 of
Americans think
museums should
present "just the
facts," versus less
than half of museum
professionals.

Sources: From top to bottom: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016; 2017 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, Wilkening Consulting; Inclusive History in America, 2018 (audience research conducted on behalf of the Naperville Heritage Society by Wilkening Consulting)

By the Numbers was compiled by Susie Wilkening, principal of Wilkening Consulting, wilkeningconsulting.com. Reach Susie at Susie@wilkeningconsulting.com.

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Curators Committee of AAM

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- Expand your network by connecting with other curators
- Advance your career through committee service

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- Curator Core Competencies
- Excellence in Label Writing, Annual Competition
- Excellence in Exhibition, Annual Competition
- CurCom Code of Ethics



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Contact: aamcurcom@gmail.com

“Curators make sense of the world around us.
They separate fact from fiction, and present what
we need to hear, not always what we want to hear.”

W. James Burns, Ph.D., Chair, CurCom



Landis Valley Village & Farm Museum

“Thrown, Fired, and Glazed: The Redware Tradition from Pennsylvania and Beyond” celebrates the distinct nature of Pennsylvania German redware and sgraffito while exploring the differences between redware in Europe and the United States. The exhibition includes a variety of forms, both utilitarian and decorative as well as marked and unmarked; archaeological fragments; and examples of tools and equipment used in the making of redware.

Location: Lancaster, PA

Dates: March–Dec.

Learn more: landisvalleymuseum.org/explore/collections/visitor-center-exhibit/

New England Air Museum

“8 Minutes: Bradley Air Museum and the 1979 Windsor Locks Tornado” brings together photographs, moving images, documents, and objects to tell the story of the F4 tornado that cut a path of destruction through north-central Connecticut and Massachusetts on October 3, 1979. Visitors are invited to explore the details of the event itself, the rescue efforts in its immediate aftermath, and the long road to recovery for both the museum and the affected communities.

Location: Windsor Locks, CT

Dates: through June 1

Learn more: neam.org

Bates College Museum of Art

In “Miracles and Glory Abound,” Vanessa German created an installation that is, in part, a reinterpretation of Emanuel Leutze’s iconic and mythic 19th-century painting *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. In this immersive installation, German transposes Leutze’s figures with her Afrocentric female power figures that reference African spiritual traditions and nkisi spiritual effigies, adorning her figures in a variety of found objects.

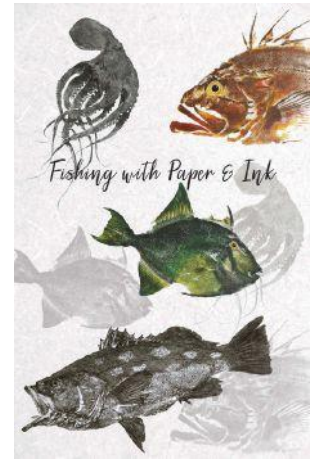
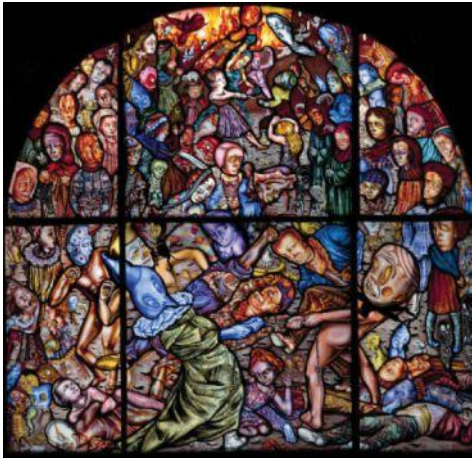
Location: Lewiston, ME

Dates: through March 28

Partners: Flint Institute of Arts and Figge Art Museum

Learn more: bates.edu/museum/vanessa-german-miracles-and-glory-abound/

Landis Valley Village & Farm Museum; New England Air Museum; courtesy of the Figge Art Museum



Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester

“The Path to Paradise: Judith Schaechter’s Stained-Glass Art” is the first survey and major scholarly assessment of the artist’s 37-year career. Drawing from both private and institutional collections, the exhibition presents more than 40 of Schaechter’s stained-glass panels along with a selection of related drawings, sketchbooks, and process materials.

Location: Rochester, NY

Dates: Feb. 16–May 24

Learn more: mag.rochester.edu/exhibitions/the-path-to-paradise-judith-schaechters-stained-glass-art/

Boca Raton Museum of Art

“Tree of Knowledge” involves a residency with sculptor and performance artist Maren Hassinger, who will create an installation inspired by Boca Raton’s Pearl City neighborhood and the banyan tree that has become a historical marker in this community settled by African Americans. With the public, the artist will roll newspapers in storytelling sessions to form the aerial roots of a vast “Tree of Knowledge” to be installed from the museum’s main gallery ceiling.

Location: Boca Raton, FL

Dates: through March 1

Learn more: bocamuseum.org/exhibitions/maren-hassinger-tree-knowledge

Santa Barbara Maritime Museum

“Fishing with Paper and Ink” features prints of West Coast fish and other marine life in the Japanese Gyotaku tradition from two nature-printing artists—Eric Hochberg and Dwight Hwang. The objective of nature printing is to express the essence of nature through the medium of paper or cloth and ink. Each plant or animal has its own unique texture, shape, and energy, and by isolating the subject in the negative space on a sheet of paper, this signature can be identified.

Location: Santa Barbara, CA

Dates: through March 30

Learn more: sbmm.org



New Orleans Jazz Museum

As a trumpeter, singer, songwriter, and performer, Louis Prima's swinging persona conquered New York, Las Vegas, Hollywood, and points in between. In "The Wildest: Louis Prima Comes Home," visitors can view photos, hear recordings, and see the instruments and stage wear of this New Orleans-born performer. The original composer of "Sing, Sing, Sing," Prima made his mark on the jazz swing era throughout his career, combining a tight swing style with loose vocals and personality.

Location: New Orleans, LA

Dates: through Sept. 30

Partner: Gia Maione Prima Foundation

Learn more: nolajazzmuseum.org/articles/2019/04/17/louis-prima-pr

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art

Acclaimed artist Ai Weiwei presents his new *Zodiac* (2018) LEGO series in which 12 portraits are made entirely of LEGO pieces and measure 90-by-90 inches each. The *Zodiac* LEGO series demonstrates the artist's continued focus on the zodiac animal concept, building on the success of his internationally acclaimed *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads: Bronze and Gold* (2010) sculpture series.

Location: Sarasota, FL

Dates: through Feb. 2

Learn more: ringling.org/events/ai-weiwei-zodiac-2018-lego

Gadsden Arts Center & Museum

"Compelled to Create" presents spirit-infused work by "Mr. Eddy" Mumma, an individual who was driven to create hundreds of works of art. "Mr. Eddy," a lonely shut-in due to complications from diabetes, painted hundreds of portraits and then refused to sell them, as they were his "companions." A master of color and composition, Mumma's highly stylized paintings vibrate with emotion.

Location: Quincy, FL

Dates: April 3–June 13

Learn more: gadsdenarts.org/exhibitions/Compelled

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.

New Orleans Jazz Museum; courtesy of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art; photo courtesy of Gadsden Arts Center & Museum

Toledo Museum of Art

“ONE EACH: Still Lifes by Pissarro, Cézanne, Manet & Friends” features still lifes by French painters, all created in a single decade—the 1860s. Included are sterling examples from the hand of Édouard Manet, regarded as the “father of modern painting,” and Paul Cézanne, considered to have been the driving precursor of Cubism. Rounding out the group are paintings by Claude Monet, Henri Fantin-Latour, and Gustave Courbet.

Location: Toledo, OH

Dates: Jan. 18–April 12

Learn more: toledomuseum.org/one-each



Spurlock Museum of World Cultures

How do drag queens get “that look”? Is it just their attitude and fierceness, or is there strategy and intentional craft involved? “In Her Closet—How to Make a Drag Queen,” an exhibition in which the Spurlock Museum of World Cultures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign partnered with a dozen local drag artists, explores these questions and curates a selection of materials loaned by several drag performers connected to the Urbana-Champaign area.

Location: Urbana, IL

Dates: through May 3

Learn more: spurlock.illinois.edu/exhibits/profiles/in-her-closet.html

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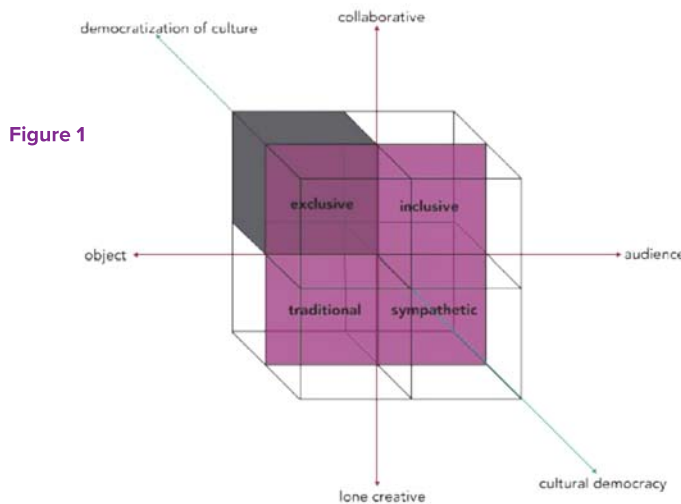




Democracy in Action

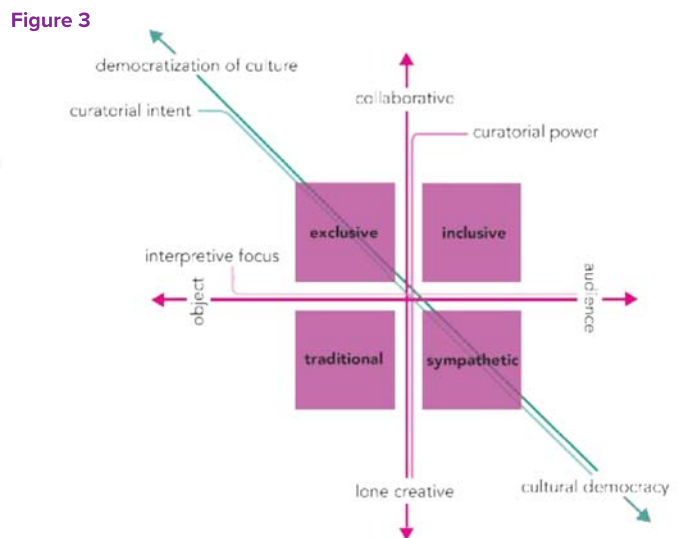
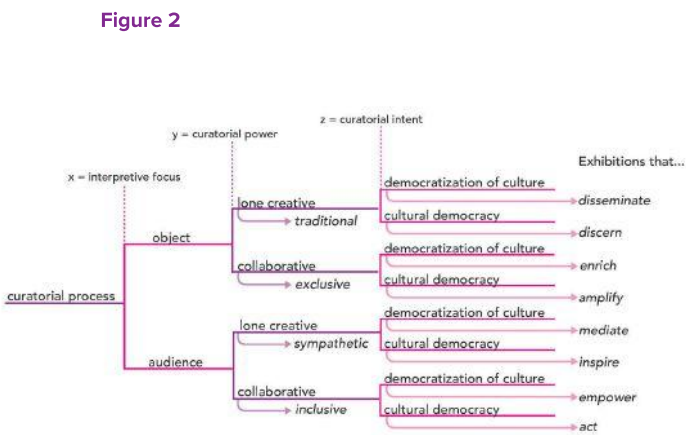
The Dimensions of Curation Competing Values Exhibition Model can help curators navigate today's changing landscape.

By Ann Rowson Love, Pat Villeneuve, and James Burns



More than ever, the word “curator” is a part of popular cultural understanding. As exhibited through social media, people can curate their closets, their homes, their lives. While this exciting development expands the often-perceived exclusivity and privilege associated with who can be a curator, it also leads to misunderstandings about the roles of curators and curation in museums.

Coupled with this phenomenon, curators now have new roles



“Curators, central to maintaining and preserving the public trust in museums, can provide the link to inclusive practices throughout their organizations.”

regarding collaboration, colonial and post-colonial collection practices, environmental sustainability, and shared authority and co-curation with community members. These evolving responsibilities help build more relevant museums and community engagement while also requiring curators to choose among competing values. Where once curators held individual autonomy in exhibitions and collections decision-making, they now have many values to consider.

The redefinition of curatorial roles and responsibilities has evolved over the past two or more decades. AAM’s landmark 1992 report, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, called for more inclusion and diversity across all functions of museums, including curation and exhibition development. And in a 1999 issue of *Daedalus*, Stephen Weil’s groundbreaking call for museums to shift from being about something to being for someone sparked the competing object-centered and visitor-centered approaches to curation still

debated at conferences and in publications.

We propose a new model to aid curatorial decision-making that focuses on the competing values facing curators and collaborators today. The model helps individuals or teams orient their work in two ways:

1. It helps curators and collaborators make conscious choices among competing values during curation activities, particularly exhibition development.
2. It provides museums with an organizational road map of decision-making possibilities that lead to strengthened institutional goals and values.

The Model

Our model is based on a competing values framework for organizational effectiveness. The framework creators, Robert E. Quinn and John Rohrbaugh, noted “recognized dilemmas”—such as whether an organization should have an external or internal focus—that they conceptualized as competing values. Placing these

at either end of continua suggests ranges of possible practices between the alternatives. The appropriateness of any choice depends on the context.

In our adapted Dimensions of Curation Competing Values Exhibition Model, *x*- and *y*-axes representing a museum’s interpretive focus and control of the curatorial process delineate four quadrants describing distinct curatorial practices (traditional, exclusive, sympathetic, and inclusive). (See the pink plane in Figure 1.) A *z*-axis reflecting curatorial intent yields eight curatorial practices we have labeled “exhibitions that ___” (disseminate, enrich, empower, etc.). (See Figure 2.)

X-Axis

The *x*-axis represents a range in interpretive focus, from the object to the audience. Traditionally, art museums have provided strong examples of object-centered practices, showcasing quality objects that speak for themselves. More recently, curators have realized that attending to the needs and interests of their communities

can attract more people to their exhibitions. An interpretive focus on the audience in no way undermines the integrity of the objects. Rather, it ensures that the exhibition will resonate with greater numbers of people.

Object: A curator reveals an interpretive focus on the object by stating, “The V&A has the finest example of that type of glass. We need to underscore its importance.”

Audience: A curator demonstrates an interpretive focus on the audience when saying, “We need to think about how LGBTQ+ audiences might respond to this exhibition.”

Y-Axis

The *y*-axis reflects the power to control the curatorial process, from the solitary expert we’ve labeled the lone creative to a collaborative approach. The lone creative curator works independently and is responsible for decisions through much of the curatorial process, from conception through installation. At the other end of the continuum,

a collaborative approach to the curatorial process benefits from input from other museum staff as well as appropriate community knowledge bearers.

Lone creative: A curator indicates her control over the curatorial process by stating, “As the leading scholar in this area, I’ll write the catalogue essay for this exhibition.”

Collaborative: A curator recognizes the value of contributions from others when saying, “We should involve members from the Hmong community in the interpretation of their objects.”

Z-Axis

The *z*-axis presents a continuum from democratization of culture to cultural democracy, two cultural policy orientations that have a long history in museums. Traditionally, museums were founded to provide access to culture and education to help democratize nations through the interpretation of cultural objects. The democratization of culture attempts accessibility for all,

generally focused on interpretation presented by experts.

Cultural democracy, on the other hand, is grounded in grassroots, social activism. While democratization of culture presents a top-down approach focused on sharing expertise with broad public audiences, cultural democracy starts in the community and focuses on shared authority and action. Although curators may not refer to their work using these cultural policy terms, they regularly articulate their curatorial intent or vision for exhibitions.

Democratization of culture: A curator states the intent of an exhibition as “an opportunity for the public to view and experience these important cultural objects using a post-colonial scholarly lens.” (See Figure 3.)

Cultural democracy: A curator working with activists from the community “promotes individual action to reduce the human footprint through eco-centric design.”

A Director’s Perspective

As illustrated by the articles in this issue—which cover the evolution of curatorial thinking, decolonizing collecting and interpretive practices, audience engagement with collections, and the skills required of 21st-century curators—the competing values exhibition model can be used to plot curatorial practices. It can be a useful educational tool to align staff with strategic goals and direction, start a dialogue with boards, and transparently share an organization’s progress with its audiences. Boards are a linchpin



Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums, 1992

www2.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/resource-library/excellence-and-equity.pdf

Ann Rowson Love and Pat Villeneuve, “Edu-Curation and the Edu-Curator,” in *Visitor-Centered Exhibitions and Edu-Curation in Art Museums*, 2017

Stephen Weil, “From Being About Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum,” *Daedalus*, Summer 1999

Robert E. Quinn and John Rohrbaugh, “A Competing Values Approach to Organizational Effectiveness,” *Public Productivity Review*, June 1981

in the evolution; without their support, an organization can stagnate, opting to continue on the same course and hoping for a different outcome. The important role that executive directors and CEOs play in driving inclusive curatorial practices cannot be overstated.

Curators, central to maintaining and preserving the public trust in museums, can provide the link to inclusive practices throughout their organizations. To succeed, they need support from directors and their colleagues to lead inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility

(IDEA) work and solidify meaningful institutional change.

Objectivity, diplomacy, finesse, and open-mindedness are the 21st-century tools curators need to succeed; these are additive, not subtractive. These skills position curators, and by extension their organizations, to walk the thin line that unites audiences. To acquire such a skill set, curators will need new pathways for training, whether through professional organizations, university programs, or MOOCs (massive open online courses).

Could democratizing aspects of the curatorial process, pulling back the curtain and sharing advice

gleaned from decades of experience, lead to greater support than ever? This could be a new heyday for curators.

Ann Rowson Love is an associate professor and coordinator of museum education and visitor-centered curation in the Department of Art Education at Florida State University, **Pat Villeneuve** is a professor and director of arts administration in the Department of Art Education at Florida State University, and **James Burns** is executive director of the Arizona Historical Society.

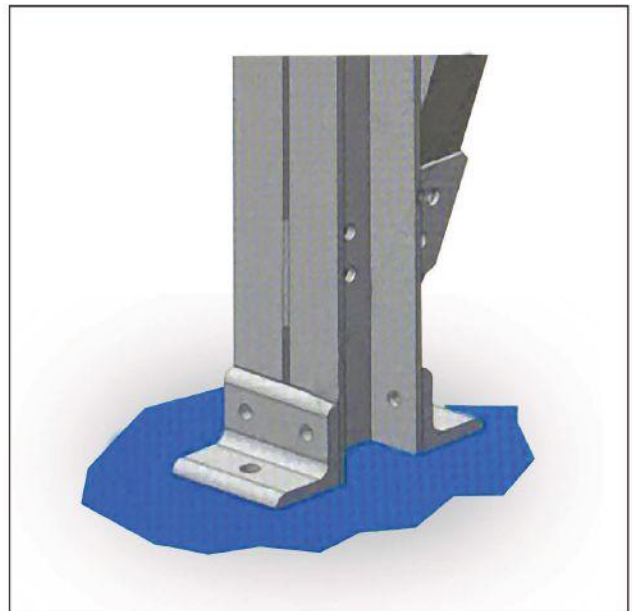


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"Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently." – Henry Ford

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The Opportunities Ahead

Mary Anne
Carter, chair of
the National
Endowment for
the Arts, catches
up with AAM
President and
CEO Laura Lott.



On August 1, 2019, the Senate confirmed Mary Anne Carter as the 12th chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, a position she had held in an acting capacity since June 5, 2018. AAM President and CEO Laura Lott recently spoke with Carter about a range of topics, including how the arts positively affect learning, health, and well-being; increasing the American people's access to the Endowment; and the Blue Star Museums program.

What brought you to the National Endowment for the Arts?

When my daughter was 7, she was diagnosed with dyslexia, and I knew immediately the traditional classroom was not going to be successful for her. So I started looking for alternative teaching methods, and we found a school where the arts are integrated into the teaching method and the classroom. Once she started there, everything changed. School was no longer a place of frustration, but an actual institution of learning, which is what a school should be. And while the arts are a necessity for my child to learn, I realized that every child could benefit from learning in different ways. The arts promote creativity, thinking outside the box, and critical thinking. I think about that every day.

How long have you been at the Endowment?

Since January 2017, when I was appointed senior deputy

“Museums really are community centers, or perhaps a better name might be community magnets and anchors because they bring communities together.”



chairman, and then on August 1, 2019, I was appointed chairman.

In your first few years at the Endowment, what have you learned about the agency's priorities?

I learned the breadth of the agency's work is broad, and its footprint across the nation is more expansive than I had imagined. So as chairman, I want to make sure that every American has access to the arts—across all 435 congressional districts.

In June of 2018, we traveled to Charleston, West Virginia, with our National Council on the Arts. It was the first council meeting outside of Washington, DC, in approximately 28 years.

After visiting a lot of museums this summer, what are your thoughts about the future of museums?

I rarely go anywhere without visiting a museum. It really doesn't matter where it is in America—urban areas, rural areas—wherever you are, there

are museums or cultural centers. Museums really are community centers, or perhaps a better name might be community magnets and anchors because they bring communities together.

You have a unique background as a public affairs consultant, and I'm curious how that has informed your leadership at the Endowment.

I think one of the things I saw was the lack of branding and marketing, and the public not knowing what the agency does. America deserves to know what we do—and where we do it. So being able to show the footprint, I think, has made a huge difference.

What role can museums play in the areas of health and well-being, and what are the opportunities for museums?

Well, I continue to see museums as a centerpiece of so many communities. They are the places that many people go when they need solace or reflection, or perhaps when tragedy strikes. And it is

“Creative Forces, our art therapy program for our men and women in uniform recovering from traumatic brain injury, has really been successful. I think the biggest area of growth for the arts is actually in the area of health and well-being.”

typically the museums that open their doors to everyone, whether it's first responders like firefighters seeking shelter or community members needing sanctuary after a tragedy. And I think communities will continue to seek out museums for that.

AAM recently launched a new initiative for the increased aging population in our country who want to stay physically and mentally active longer through the arts. What advice might you have for museums on this topic?

This demographic might be divided into two groups: those who are healthy and want to continue to be active, and those who have some cognitive issues but want to continue to learn and participate as much as they can. My own father had dementia, and I witnessed firsthand the difference the arts made. He lived in a wonderful memory care facility, and every day they had two art periods, and sometimes they would visit museums. But typically, once a day, a pianist would come to play songs from their youth.

Tell us more about your current priorities for making the Endowment more accessible to more people.

We have many amazing programs that blanket the nation, and I'm working really hard to give them more exposure. For example, Poetry Out Loud is a poetry recitation contest for high school students involving almost 300,000 students each year. Since the program began in 2005, 4 million students, 60,000 teachers, and 16,000 high schools have participated. When you see this program in action, when you see high school students pick a poem out of a trove of poems that we have, memorize it, and then recite it publicly, it is transformational.

Creative Forces, our art therapy program for our men and women in uniform recovering from traumatic brain injury, has really been successful. I think the biggest area of growth for the arts is actually in the area of health and well-being. Creative Forces has been so successful, in fact, that we are exploring adapting the model for opioid recovery and pediatric oncology.

In this era of increasing mistrust of public institutions and greater polarization in our society, what is the value of museums in uniting people and building trust?

Whether it's across political spectrums or socioeconomic difference or racial and ethnic difference, museums bring people together. I think museums have a unique place in communities. They are the place of comfort and respite, and they are community centers that are there in good times and bad.

Any last thoughts on our continuing partnership with the Blue Star Museums program?

It has been a resounding success. We're just finishing up our 10th season, and more than 2,000 museums across the nation participated. I want to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to them for welcoming active-military men and women and their families to their sites to learn more about their collections, exhibitions, and programs.

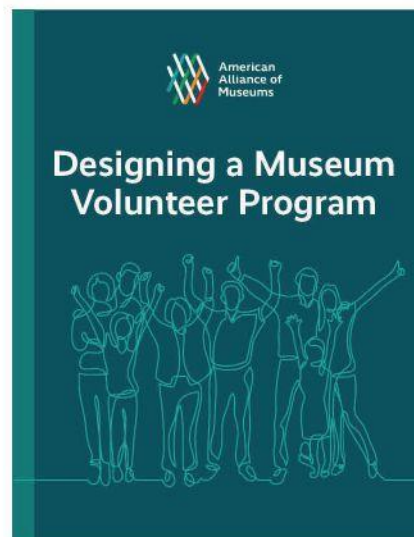
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Curators Take Flight

Four curators cast a wide eye on the shifting landscape for curatorial practice.



It's an exciting time to be a curator. The role is evolving and the field is broadening.

Recently, four professionals at various stages of their curatorial careers—emerging, mid-career, and late-career—sat down to discuss some of these changes: **René Paul Barilleaux**, head of curatorial affairs at the McNay Art Museum; **Laura Minton**, curatorial assistant, prints, and drawings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; **Dr. Porchia Moore**, assistant professor of museum studies at the School of Art + Art History, University of Florida, and former curator of the rotating African American gallery “Spoken” at the Columbia Museum of Art; and **Dr. Noelle Trent**, director of interpretation, collections, and education at the National Civil Rights Museum.

What do curators do?

Barilleaux: My institution, the McNay, has a traditional history. We have curators from varied backgrounds. Each is defining their curatorial work differently. Curators today do a broad range of things that are partly defined by audience, partly by personal vision, partly by need, and so on.

Minton: Many people are unfamiliar with the curatorial profession. It is important to emphasize how much work and effort goes into creating exhibitions. Because exhibitions often look pristine, the labor involved to produce them is not always visible. Curators also engage in activities beyond exhibitions, such as interfacing with the public, conducting research, scholarly writing, and fundraising.

Moore: My understanding of who I am as a curator and the role of a curator has changed. I have a Ph.D. in library and information science, and that library pedagogy informs me. I view myself as a cross-pollinator, someone who works and lives in the museums but approaches museums from a library/information science lens. Because of that, I see curatorial work as a kind of storytelling and information praxis. I view it as a form of social justice practice and activism. Curatorial work is about being culturally responsive, being able to rapidly respond to issues such as police violence or even just being able to navigate and cultivate conversation. So for me, this work is about

sharing of information and helping to highlight and uncover suppressed narratives.

Trent: I have historical training rather than an art history background. When I say curator, I think people tend to imagine artwork. In helping them to understand my work, I compare it to what the Smithsonian does, looking at objects and communities and privileging voices. But when we have artwork come to our museum, when we are creating exhibitions, I have to explain to the artist that our audience isn't your usual art audience, and you need to create the messaging around your artwork. Otherwise my visitors aren't going to get it. That is the other layer of what we do.


How are curatorial roles changing and expanding today?

Trent: I think the big elephant in the room in these conversations now is the diversity and inclusion piece. Voice is present in the work that we do, and bias, intended or otherwise, is something that the curatorial field is really embracing in powerful ways. Some communities have been doing this for much longer, but now it has hit the broader conversation.


Moore: We are seeing curators who are not employed in museums but who are creating real places of dialogue and activism within their communities—people who are really stretching in pleasurable, exciting, innovative, and creative ways the confines of what curatorial work and praxis actually is and can be.

Trent: I think there is some value in different ways of getting the training experience because we don't want to lose the praxis, right? Even if you do pop-ups, and you are a little bit freer doing that, there are some things you need to learn at some point. You are going to have to learn, whether someone teaches you or you do it through trial and error, about the value of the well-written exhibit label.

Minton: I come from a traditional art historian background, and writing for the public is much different from academic writing. I did not learn to write for the public in my graduate work; I learned it on the job in different museums.



“Voice is present in the work that we do, and bias, intended or otherwise, is something that the curatorial field is really embracing in powerful ways.”



Moore: I am interested in the ways curators can access points of informational curiosity.

Barilleaux: We’ve been on a campaign to write labels for our collection galleries and have spread it across curators of every level and with education staff. We’ve also created focus groups with community members who vet labels to see if we’re hitting the right points—hoping to respond to what our community wants to know.

Minton: Your approach allows for a dispersal of voice, so it is not just one single, faceless author.

Barilleaux: We had feedback from the community saying that they prefer different voices in the labels. Sometimes a label is focused on the artist, sometimes on the object, sometimes on the context of the object. We learned that people don’t want standardization—they want each label to feel fresh.

Moore: I think that is really powerful.

Trent: That shared voice, shared authority has tremendous appeal.

Moore: It makes me think about one of the components of the ICOM-proposed new definition for museums—this idea that the museum is a space for polyphonic voices.

Barilleaux: It’s not that we lose authority, it’s that we become a filter—hearing from the audience and hearing that they read the labels.

Moore: I think that risk taking is so important. Moving forward, will we need labels?

Trent: We have found that for roughly 60 percent of our visitors, this is their first museum experience. So our panels and our labels need to guide people through the pain, through whatever is there. I have worked with artists on thinking about how they want to guide visitors.

Moore: What is an embodied museum visitor experience? How can it really help visitors understand things like information literacy, visual literacy, and civic literacy? Are labels the best way to do that?

Barilleaux: Especially with temporary exhibitions, we’ve started to create a whole experience. For example, we recently presented Andy Warhol’s portraits—primarily from the 1970s—accompanied by a disco ’70s soundtrack that played in the gallery. We noticed that people really felt engaged—it took them to a different time in their lives; it made a holistic experience. Another approach we tried was instead of narrative labels, we presented bullet points, so visitors could go right to what they want to know.

Minton: My institution presented a similarly immersive experience alongside “Vincent van Gogh: His Life in Art.” Near the exhibition, there was an interactive gallery where Van Gogh’s paintings came to life through art-making activities, digital experiences, photo-ops, and walk-in recreations of paintings in 3D; there was a lot of interest in this. It makes me think of the idea of play in museums as an entry point.

Trent: I think the digital space is going to be really critical for how we move forward because it will allow us to layer the experience. Someone on the curatorial staff still has to generate the content, but once you do the onerous work of creating that database of information, photo licenses, the sound, and whatever else you want to include, you can layer it out. We all know there are the people who skim, and there are the people who really want to emotionally connect.

Minton: Right now, curating and creating your own experience is important to many people. In one of our recent exhibitions, we included an iPad that presented additional text and artworks with Spanish translations as well as interviews with local artists. A survey conducted during the exhibition noted where people were spending the most time in the room, and the iPad was the number one hotspot.

colleges and universities have a long history of such programs. Hampton University has the first African American museum in the country. Howard has a really great public history program that has trained people to go into the curatorial and archives fields. Andrea Brownlee is a phenomenal curator at Spelman College, which is training young women at the undergraduate level to go into curatorial work.

Moore: I look at the work that people like Kelli Morgan, who is a curator of American history at Newfields in Indianapolis, are doing, people like LaTanya Autry.

Trent: What I find frustrating is that some of these folks who decide this is the path they want to be on will get these fellowships, and because they are a person of color, they end up being overwhelmed and overworked.



“If we are really pushing to diversify, be inclusive, decolonize, the curator has a lot of authority and influence in how that happens.”



Barilleaux: For a recent exhibition, we decided not to create a printed catalogue but a microsite that was accessible to anyone at any time for free. It was a more democratic way of sharing.

What are some of the pathways to entering the curatorial field?

Trent: There is the typical art historian route if you are in art museums. But I know educators who got their advanced degrees in education and evolved into curation because they also have specialized expertise. Some museum studies programs and public history programs facilitate that as well. Historically black

Moore: Definitely, and let's go ahead and say it, tokenized. That emotional labor that we don't always talk about is that they are expected to now just do that work. They are not allowed the freedom and liberation to explore whatever their interests may be. So it is important when we talk about recruitment that we also talk about retention. We don't want to cultivate all of these brilliant, bright folks to come into museums as curators, and then they come into environments that are hostile or oppressive or simply do not have the resources to nourish them. I think that is actually more harmful.

Trent: It is frustrating to meet someone who is brilliant and has put in the time to get the content, but you can see that the institution has worn them out and said, “you are the black voice, you are the person of color voice, let’s throw all of these things on you way too soon.” They don’t have the support they need, and if they fail, it becomes a reason for why we can’t do this, or “we tried to look for them, but people aren’t going to these programs.” Also, if you don’t get certain graduate degrees, you’re not competitive in the marketplace. And sometimes these wages are not livable.

Minton: I think compensation is a problem in entry-level curatorial positions and can be a barrier for working in the field. It can be difficult to support yourself when you are just starting out, relocation expenses might not be provided, and you may have debt from undergraduate and graduate school. There is an ebb and flow to when entry-level positions are even available.

Trent: I was at a conference where someone said we have to think of museums in some cases as institutions of colonialism. If we are really pushing to diversify, be inclusive, decolonize, the curator has a lot of authority and influence in how that happens. Some things are going to be uncomfortable, and I think we just have to reconcile that.

Moore: If you do agree or are aligned with this notion that museums are colonialist enterprises, to make restitution of some sort, you have to be willing to give up and/or share power and approach it through some type of space-making mechanism. Otherwise it is not authentic and is just lip service.

Minton: That is definitely an area where collaborative curating can be very beneficial, working directly with community members so there is not just one authorial voice but many.

Barilleaux: More and more within our institution we are collaborating on exhibitions, incorporating different departments. We are also engaging the community with outside committees that respond

to ideas and shape projects. Broadening the voices represented has made our projects richer.

Moore: Can we begin to have sources of power and authority come from our communities that have nothing to do with having large amounts of money?

Trent: As someone who functions on the senior management level, I don’t think there is any point where you are not going to have that conflict. A curator wants to put this idea or project out there, but there are the realities of board support and donor support. Is it on message with your museum? Do you have the support of your executive director, president, or CEO? Sometimes curators are not aware of how complex these things are.

Barilleaux: It’s the curator who brings passion to the project and brings passion to the board and staff. Sometimes colleagues cannot express the same passion. That’s a point where the curator can affect real change, bringing passion to get everyone excited.

Trent: And donors. I am brought in to make the donors excited, to make them understand that this is a great opportunity. Then you bring in your development and other folks to work through the technical aspects.

Final thoughts?

Moore: I really appreciate being able to have this conversation. It is very refreshing to talk to and learn from all of you, to hear what is happening in other corners. The word for that would be community; it is good to be a part of a community.

Barilleaux: We tend to approach this work as cookie-cutter—everyone must do the same thing in the same way. We can do it differently and it is still valid. We can put our own personal spin on things and make it unique.

Trent: Anytime we can discuss, sometimes commiserate, and figure out new ways to create experiences, it is a benefit to the public knowledge in a way we could have never imagined when we were in school or training for the work we are doing.



A sculpture on the museum's façade depicts one of many Franciscan missionaries involved in the colonization of Kumeyaay peoples.





Knowing Better, Doing Better

The San Diego Museum of Man takes a holistic approach to decolonization.

By Micah Parzen

As museum professionals, we typically think of the word “curate” as a verb meaning “to collect, organize, and present” a group of items, often within the context of an exhibition. Another common meaning is “to be in charge of, or manage, a collection, gallery, or museum.” These definitions inform our industry’s approach, thinking, and identity surrounding curatorial practice. We see ourselves—and others see us—as expert in these activities.

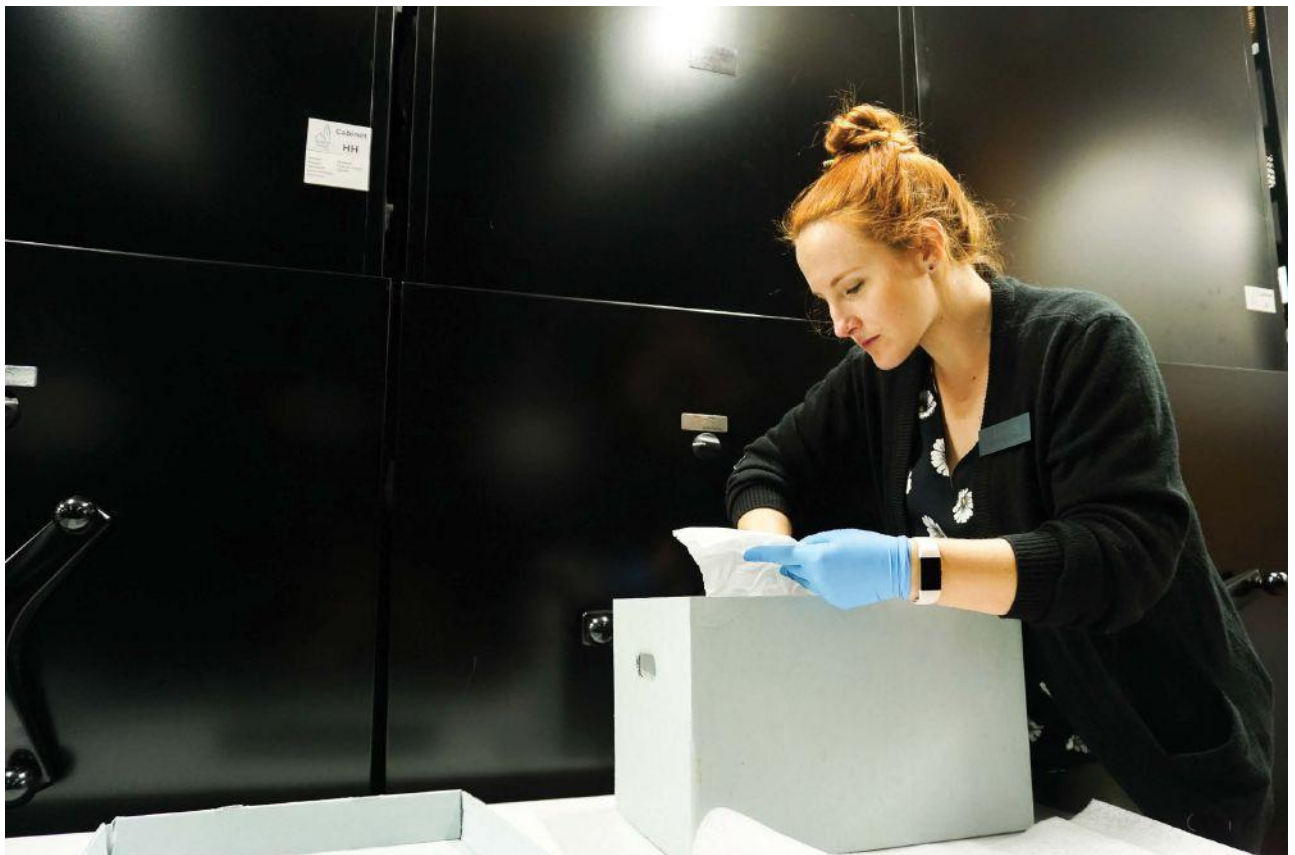
The origins of the word, however, may suggest an alternative way of framing what we do. Derived from the Latin, “curate” is also a noun meaning “a spiritual guide” or “one responsible for the care of souls.” Within the context of its root verb “to cure”—meaning “to restore to health, or heal”—the curatorial endeavor takes on a far more holistic hue. When viewed through this lens, we have an opportunity to rethink the very nature of our expertise and the role we play in our communities.

Shifting the Paradigm

Such a rethinking has largely informed our work at the San Diego Museum of Man in Balboa Park, which sits on the ancestral homelands of the Kumeyaay Nation. For the past nine years, I have had the humbling honor of serving as CEO at this museum, founded in 1915 as part of the Panama-California Exposition. Our mission is “inspiring human connections by exploring the human experience.” We do that by sharing alternative narratives that challenge people’s assumptions and get them thinking, feeling, and even acting in new ways.

As an institution, we see pain and suffering in the world all around us. Whether that pain and suffering comes in the form of structural racism, colonial legacy, or other forms of oppression, we believe there is a path to healing, and we may have a part to play. Inspired by anthropological values—sitting in generosity, not in judgment; walking a mile in others’ shoes; and compassion for all humanity—we also see hope.

The recognition that Indigenous belongings are not inanimate objects but rather living beings due all respect and care is core to the museum’s cultural stewardship practices.



We believe that if we hold ourselves accountable and act in trust-based partnership with others, there may be an opportunity for us to become a part of the solution. Taking that path requires acknowledging the pain and suffering, unpacking it, and doing the work—both on our own and in partnership—to find a way through. It is difficult work. It is necessary work. But most of all, it is transformational work.

We recognize that many museums, including ours, emerged from the colonial endeavor and the self-righteous belief that to the victor go the spoils. The colonizers, in turn, felt entitled to extract the cultural, environmental, and human resources of the colonized. Many cultural resources ended up in museums like ours, which wasted no time in asserting their authoritative expertise not only over the “artifacts,” but also over native and Indigenous peoples themselves. This paradigm of museum as expert over the “other” has largely justified our existence for the past 100 years.

The practice of decolonizing is one of shifting that paradigm. It is a process of recognizing, holding ourselves accountable for, and actively working to redress the traumatic legacy of colonialism on Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. Central to this effort is undoing systems of oppression that continue to perpetuate those traumas today. Our work to decolonize our cultural resources was chronicled by my colleagues in an article titled “Ceding Authority and Seeding Trust,” which appeared in the July/August 2019 issue of this magazine.

Expanding Our Practices

Over time, and with the support of an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant, our decolonizing work has grown, and we have grown into our decolonizing work, often in unexpected ways. We learned, for example, that our initial focus on our cultural resources was a good place to start, but it

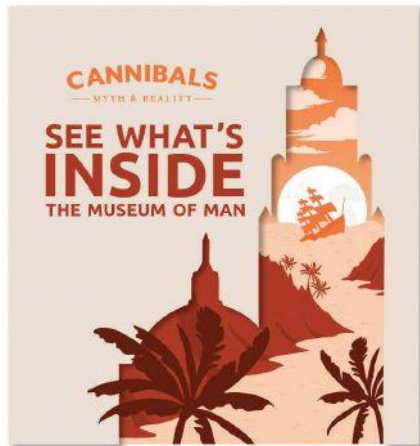


A member of the museum's team sews muslin drapes that help honor the sanctitude of Indigenous belongings the museum stewards.

WHAT DOES CURATION LOOK LIKE HERE?

Several years ago, we eliminated the position of “curator” at our museum, and we began hiring “exhibit developers” instead. We did so because we wanted the look, feel, and content of our exhibitions to emerge out of a multiplicity of voices from throughout the institution and our community. We felt that the traditional role of a curator—a subject matter expert with tremendous passion and academic knowledge—could inhibit this process.

Our exhibit developers wear a variety of hats. They are researchers, project managers, dialogue facilitators, community liaisons, writers, storytellers, and evaluators—all wrapped into one. They are the shepherds that bring an idea to life as an experience for our visitors. Every exhibition we have developed since 2015 has followed this model.



Top: The original design concept of the “Cannibals: Myth & Reality” exhibition poster. Bottom: The final design of the poster, reflecting a decolonizing approach.



was truly just that. We now see how the silos of our industry perpetuate the very paradigm we seek to shift and that decolonizing our ways of thinking must inform every aspect of our work. They must pervade our institutional DNA itself.

Our decolonizing initiatives now go well beyond our cultural resources to include not only our exhibits and public programs, but also our marketing, our governance, and even our human resources practices. For us, the driving question is: Does this particular practice contribute—either directly or indirectly—to the colonial enterprise and systematic oppression, and if so, how can we best collaboratively change that?

Some examples may be instructive.

People First

One simple but important way we are expanding our work is through a widespread practice of institutional land acknowledgment. This consists of a formal,

place-specific statement recognizing and expressing gratitude to the Indigenous peoples who have been dispossessed and displaced by colonialism. We are now integrating a recognition of the Kumeyaay peoples into our staff email signature blocks; the beginning of our educational tours, workshops, board meetings, and fundraising events; and within our public media partnerships, among other spaces. We are committed to doing this in ways that are authentic and not merely performative.

Language Matters

The words we use have important implications, of course, and we have engaged in a deep reexamination of ours. The people we historically referred to as “mummies,” “shrunken heads,” and “specimens,” for example, we now call “ancestors,” “ancestral human remains,” or “mummified ancestors.” This humanizes and, in turn, honors the individuals whose after-lives we respectfully steward. The items we previously referred to as “artifacts” in our “collections,” we now call “belongings” or “items” in our “cultural resources.” Rather than centering our language on the “collectors” who often acquired the items under untoward circumstances, the term “cultural resources” is centered on the Indigenous peoples who made, used, and imbued those items with meaning. Similarly, the rooms we previously referred to as “labs”—a term that reinforces the scientific and taxonomic classification of an “other”—we now simply refer to as “storage areas,” or in the case of ancestor housing, a “sanctuary space” or “the Willows.” We are creating a glossary for our staff, board, and volunteers so that, collectively, our language is humanizing at every turn.

Decolonized Marketing

We are shifting the language we use with the public, too. Our goal is to remove barriers of visitation and participation for Indigenous communities, and we recognize the impact of marketing language and graphic design in creating an inclusive and welcoming space. In addition to bringing land acknowledgments and institutional truth-telling into our marketing materials, we no longer use designs that evoke colonial imagery, which both embodies and reproduces trauma for many Indigenous visitors.

Our “Cannibals: Myth & Reality” exhibition marketing, for example, originally included a colonial-era Spanish galleon and a tropical-looking shoreline. Taken together, these images reinforced the very stereotypes of the “primitive savage” the exhibition seeks to upend. In consultation with Brandie Macdonald (Chickasaw Nation/Choctaw Nation), our director of decolonizing initiatives who serves on our strategic alignment team, we replaced the galleon with a sailboat, removed the tropical palm trees, and inserted seabirds along a nondescript coastal shore. (See both versions on the previous page.) The result is a far more inclusive invitation to visit the exhibition. We now review all of our marketing materials through this lens.

Holidays for All

Although we have generous paid time-off policies at the museum, we are realizing that some of our human resources practices are problematic. We have long offered 14 paid holidays per year, for example, but several of those holidays are rooted in a colonial paradigm: New Year’s Day, Presidents Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, the day after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas, etc. For some of our staff, this conventionally Euro-American menu of holidays is, in fact, consistent with the days that they wish to mark, take off, and celebrate.

For other staff, however, this menu may be unintentionally harmful and isolating. Mandating that every employee take institutionally determined days off during the year may prevent those employees from marking the holidays that are important to them, and from taking off days when and how they wish. We are now revising our policy to allow employees to choose, and group together, holidays in ways that are meaningful to them. We are excited about changing this seemingly innocuous practice so that it better supports all of our team members in a decolonized way.

Cultivating a Learning Board

One of the most common questions other museum professionals ask when we share our decolonizing work is, “How did you get your board of trustees to

let you do all that?” My answer is always the same: “You cannot join our board if you are the smartest person in the room.” This litmus test has allowed us to build a highly diverse and unconventional community of trustees who are not only extraordinarily open-minded, but also deeply open-hearted.

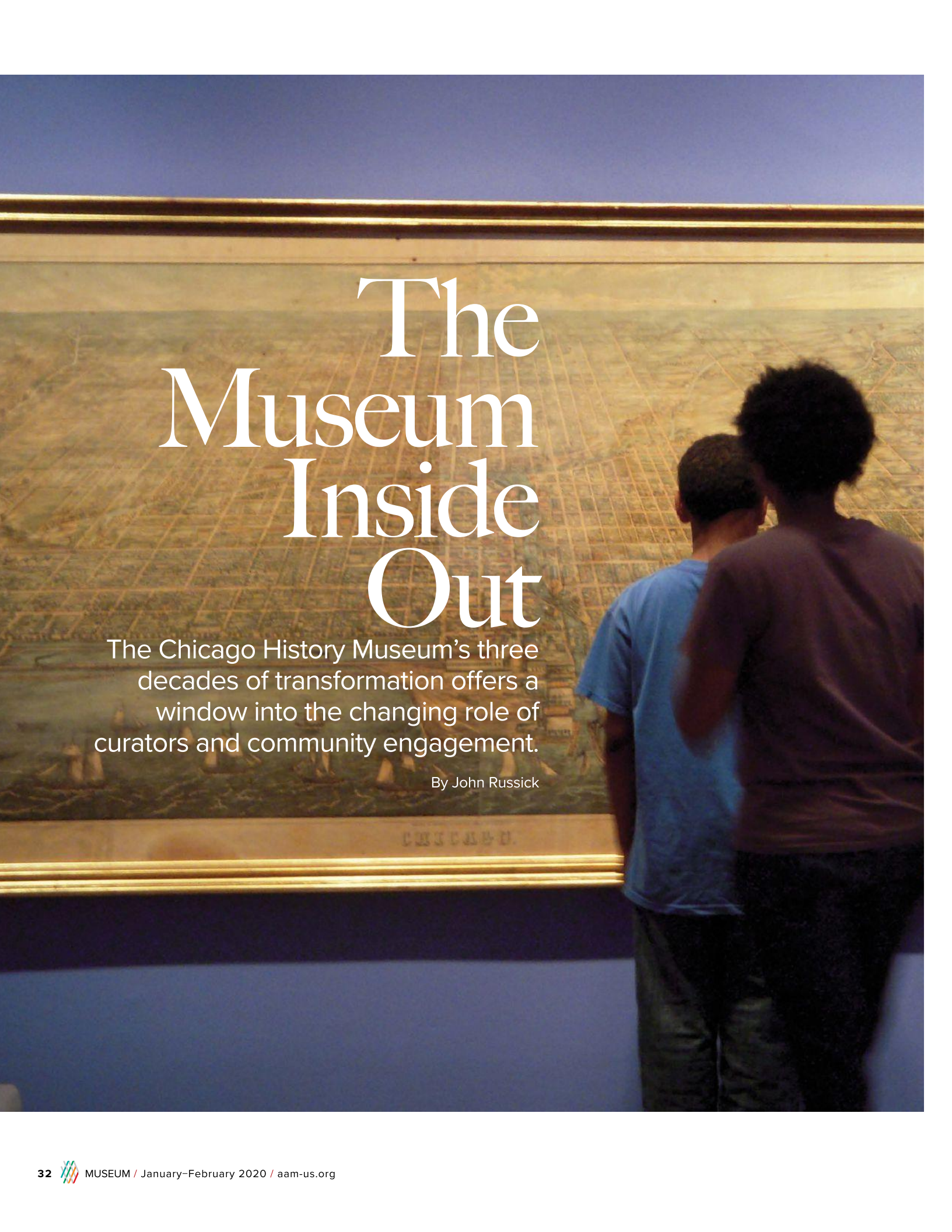
When we first made the case for decolonizing the museum at our February 2016 board retreat, however, the decision to move forward was by no means unanimous. Some trustees’ eyes lit up with immediate understanding, but others were noticeably uncomfortable. A wonderfully rich, sometimes tense, and beautifully complicated discussion emerged, and we knew then that we were on to something important for our museum. We created a working group of staff and trustees so that we could continue the conversation after the retreat.

Ben Garcia, our passionate and talented deputy director at the time, and George Ramirez, our committed (now former) board chair with extensive DEAI expertise, among others, helped move the working group forward. Its goal was to identify and grapple with the concerns, both fiduciary and strategic, raised at and after the board retreat. We gave ourselves three months, which became six months and ultimately a year of monthly working group meetings. The trustees who participated shared their struggle with the work, unpacked where that struggle was coming from, and helped us all better understand what we were up against. Collectively, we asked the difficult questions, processed deeply ingrained emotions and unconscious colonial biases, and ultimately found a path.

Maya Angelou once said, “When you know better, you do better.” We have learned so much as an institution over the past 100 years. We know better now, so we are doing better. Every day is a learning opportunity, however, and—as is often the case—our mistakes are our greatest teachers. We must not be afraid to make them, and learn from them, together. As we continue to know better, we will do better still.




Micah D. Parzen, Ph.D., J.D., is the chief executive officer of the San Diego Museum of Man.



The Museum Inside Out

The Chicago History Museum's three decades of transformation offers a window into the changing role of curators and community engagement.

By John Russick



The Chicago History Museum's object study, conducted in 2011 and 2012, helped the museum inspire more meaningful engagement with diverse history collections for visiting families.

“How can we turn the museum inside out . . . put the museum in the neighborhood and bring the neighborhood into the museum?”

—Peter T. Alter, chief historian and director of the Studs Terkel Center for Oral History

Founded in 1856, the Chicago Historical Society was imagined at a time of dramatic change in the city. Despite being only 23 years old at the time, Chicago was one of the fastest-growing cities on the planet and would be for the rest of the 19th century. The founders of the society recognized that if they didn't document their accomplishments, they might quickly be eclipsed and forgotten by this ambitious and dynamic city, which was unlikely to rest on its achievements.

The Chicago Historical Society evolved and expanded over the next century and more, surviving fire and flood to become a venerated institution in both Chicago's cultural landscape and the scholarly community for the significance of its holdings. The society developed a traditional organizational structure that put curators and librarians at the center of its intellectual life, which was largely focused on both the history of the people who had shaped the city and the city as central to the story of America.

Fast forward to 1974. Chicago author and radio host Studs Terkel publishes the book *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*, which came at a time when a wave of American scholars were already rethinking traditional narratives and seeking ways to tell a more inclusive national story. *Working* highlighted the value and power of the stories of ordinary people, told by ordinary people, and it influenced the work of contemporary authors such as Alex Kotlowitz, Howard Zinn, and David Isay, as well as the creators of “The Moth” and “This American Life” radio programs. Terkel also influenced countless other scholars, researchers, and curators across the country who hoped to capture the history of their communities through the voices of the people who lived it, discovering more authentic narratives of American life in the process.

Roughly 20 years after the publication of *Working*, pressed by challenging economic times and low attendance, the Chicago Historical Society sought to rewrite the story of the city with a greater emphasis on everyday people, the people of Terkel's world. It might be hard to imagine how radical an idea that was in the early-to-mid 1990s.

New Stories and New Storytellers

When *Working* was released, most living Americans had been taught the national narrative through the lives of a relatively few powerful,

Garibay Group, 2012



The Chicago History Museum began its life as the Chicago Historical Society in 1856.

ambitious, and connected ethnically white men and their families. Speaking for myself, as a boy growing up in rural Illinois in the 1970s, the key figures in American history were George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, William Clark and Meriwether Lewis, Eli Whitney, Abraham Lincoln, Orville and Wilbur Wright, Henry Ford, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy—in that order.

While the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was revered in my parents' home, he was not presented as an American hero at my school. No individual woman featured prominently in the story of America with the possible exception of Betsy Ross and Dolly Madison. And of course, no pop stars, professional athletes, or movies stars were included in the American history hall of fame. It was a narrow reading that reinforced white superiority and largely disregarded the contributions of people of color and women and their struggle for equality.

Today, it might be hard for one to imagine an American historical narrative that left out the contributions of Benjamin Banneker, Frederick Douglass, Robert Gould Shaw, Julius Rosenwald, Bessie Coleman, Jeanette Rankin, Frances Willard, Barbara Jordan, Daniel Inouye, Cesar Chavez, or Fazlur Khan, not to mention Satchel Paige, Billie Holiday, and Bruce Lee.

Even after including these figures in the story, we were still ignoring the people who, paraphrasing Jimmy Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life*, “do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community.” If they showed up in the narrative at all, these folks typically appeared as great monoliths of consumers, laborers, or the poor. But these were the people whose individual stories were so important to

Terkel. In the mid-1990s, around the time Terkel came on staff as a scholar in residence, these stories became important to the Chicago Historical Society too. However, in order to embrace that new interest, much had to change.

Between 1993 and 2005, the Chicago Historical Society dissolved its curatorial departments; launched an ambitious program of experimental exhibitions attempting to share authority and feature community voices; hired its first African American president, Lonnie G. Bunch III; and restored a curatorial practice—at Bunch's direction—with a new commitment to collecting and sharing the experiences of the city's diverse communities.

In 2005, Catherine M. Lewis published *The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum*. Lewis' book told the story of the organization as a case study through which one could explore the challenges facing any American museum seeking to include communities in the storytelling and power-sharing. She interviewed staff and leadership and reviewed the institutional archive to offer a history of one museum's journey from a curator-driven model to a more inclusive community-centered approach. She described it as a transition “from temple to forum.” The book traced the ambitious and painful transformation of one of the country's oldest and most respected historical societies into a more inclusive and vital urban history museum.

A few months before the book was published, the organization was renamed the Chicago History Museum (CHM). In 2006, it marked its 150th anniversary with a new leader, Gary T. Johnson. But change inspires more change, and CHM's transformation was far from over.

New Curatorial Imperatives

Over the past 15 years CHM has continued to try to push boundaries, and the curatorial staff has had to both lead that change and adapt to new expectations of them and their work. The museum's curators have tried to discover and advance new ways to turn the museum inside out, through innovative audience research projects, experiments in digital interpretation, providing leadership in the field, and continued commitment to

explore community collaborations. Some of this work puts the museum out in the neighborhood, some brings the neighborhood inside the museum, and some simply sharpens our skills as we continue to search for new and creative ways to advance the museum's mission. Perhaps the biggest change is that these 21st-century curators are no longer the most important voices in the museum. Today, they are the equals of the educators, designers, collections, and program staff that form our internal teams and help us realize our ambitions to be more inclusive and welcoming.

Since 2005, the CHM's Studs Terkel Center for Oral History has collaborated with community partners to promote oral history as a tool for social justice. In fact, Johnson's first act as CHM president was to ask Terkel to let the museum use his name for our new oral history center. Oral history projects in Chicago communities, such as North Lawndale and East Garfield Park, and exhibitions on the Chicago Muslim and Polish communities, have put area teens in the role of historian. Teens are recruited, trained, and then collect residents' stories to inform future projects and researchers. In the process, the teens gain the skills of the oral historian and become the keepers of the city's stories.

In 2008, curatorial staff committed to leading AAM's Excellence in Exhibition Label Writing Competition each year. This program is a collaboration with university partners that have used the program as a mentorship and professional development experience for students. The label writing competition reminds our staff and the field that despite all of the advances in communication and technology, we still primarily deliver content to our visitors with edited copy and scripted texts; therefore, our writing must be accessible and captivating.

Between 2011 and 2012, the curatorial staff worked closely with collections and exhibitions departmental staff to develop an audience research study to better understand how families engage with collections. Conducted by the Garibay Group, the object study was—and still is—shared with any museum interested in the findings. The project led to a greater understanding of our collection and how intergenerational groups work together to discover history and meaning in artifacts.

In 2013, curatorial staff at the museum launched the "Chicago 00" project (chicago00.org) to explore the potential for augmented and virtual reality to reinvent


interpretation at the museum and push our content out to communities. These award-winning digital products have helped the museum establish new patterns of working collaboratively with creative external partners, provide free interpreted content to anyone without coming to the museum, and have advanced our efforts to become a "digital first" museum.

Continuing our efforts to help communities tell their own stories to the rest of the city, last fall the museum opened the exhibition "American Medina: Stories of Muslim Chicago." Other projects designed to feature and reflect community experience and voice include "Out in Chicago" (LGBT history), "Catholic Chicago," "Shalom Chicago" (Chicago's Jewish community history), "My Chinatown" (Chicago's Chinese American community's history), and "Colonia to Community" (Chicago's multi-ethnic Southeast Side history). All of these projects invested in community engagement to give shape to the experience and the narrative. Each helped museum staff continue to develop our skills and approach, and each reinforced the museum's commitment to working with external partners in this way.

The statement at the start of this article about turning the museum inside out was made by a close colleague of mine at the museum. He and I came to the organization around the same time, roughly two decades ago. He said those words in a recent discussion about the role of the contemporary curator at CHM. But he could have said them when I met him 20 years ago. The institution has been hard at work on that goal since before he and I arrived.

As it turns out, like so many important tasks in life, that goal is not an end but a means. We continue to try to turn the museum inside out, to demonstrate our value to the community by meeting the people we serve where they are rather than always asking them to come to us.

We are on a journey. We have made many missteps along the way, and that is at least in part because there is no clear path to follow. There is no destination, no moment when we will arrive. Instead, there are multiple arrivals, each a plateau of achievement and a launchpad for the next stage of our development.

 **John Russick** is senior vice president at the Chicago History Museum.

Forging Deeper Connections

A look at two museums that are successfully engaging their audiences through their collections.

By Redmond W. Barnett and Elisa Phelps

Something is missing in many discussions of audience engagement: collections.

Museum professionals often use the term “audience engagement” to describe the public’s participation in museum activities and events. In published reports on the topic, participating museum departments include education, public programs, marketing, visitor services, and sometimes exhibits—but not often collections, library, or archives.

For example, the top item in a Google search for “audience engagement in museums” is a 2016 interview with Adam Rozan, then director of audience engagement at the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts, in *Museum-iD* magazine. Rozan describes the audience engagement division at his museum as including the “education and public programs, and communications and marketing, as well as visitor services,” but he says nothing about collections. Likewise, information about AAM’s Community & Audience Engagement Assessment, part of its accreditation and excellence programs, mentions audience evaluation, visitor service, and exhibitions and programming, but not collections.

However, no one would dispute that collections can engage audiences. But such engagement is often peripheral to thinking on this topic.

In fact, many museums are directly engaging audiences with their collections. In spring 2017, the AAM Curators Committee partnered with eight other professional networks to survey our combined memberships to find examples of interesting and innovative ideas related to the use of objects in museums. We found nearly 60 unique examples that painted a vivid picture of the ways museums use their collections to form deeper, more meaningful connections with their audiences. Our findings were reported in the Spring 2018 issue of the National Association for Museum Exhibition’s journal *Exhibition* (see Resources on p. 39).

Here, we examine two recent projects in greater depth: the New-York Historical Society’s use of collections to prepare aspiring new Americans to take the citizenship test and Orange County Regional History Center’s success in engaging audiences in unexpected ways by using its collections.

Darling Archive/Alamy Stock Photo





New-York Historical Society uses items like John Rogers' *The Slave Auction*, 1859, to help participants prepare for the US citizenship test.

known as green card holders) become US citizens. Since launching in July 2017, the program has served more than 2,300 green card holders who speak more than 70 languages and come from more than 110 countries.

Founded in 1804, New-York Historical has a long history of telling our nation's story through its vast collection. The museum and library collections include works of art, documents, ephemera, and other materials from the pre-colonial era to present day. New-York Historical regularly displays and interprets its collection to tell the American story and the new American experience. We develop curriculum guides for each major exhibition to help teachers bring nuance to the social studies classroom. These guides—the product of extensive scholarly research—tell the stories of American history through the items in New-York Historical's collection.

In 2017, New-York Historical's leadership decided to marry its successful "objects tell stories" pedagogy to a civics program designed to remove

Assisting with Citizenship

By Jennifer Schantz

What do the *The Bulls and Bears in the Market* painting, an original copy of the Declaration of Independence, John Rogers' *The Slave Auction* painted plaster, and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Naturalization Test all have in common? The answer lies in the New-York Historical Society's Citizenship Project, which uses art, documents, and objects from the institution's collections to help lawful permanent residents (also

potential barriers to citizenship faced by green card holders throughout the New York City metropolitan area. Called "The Citizenship Project," and supported by the Ford Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, J.P. Morgan Chase, The JPB Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, The New York Community Trust, the Tiger Baron Foundation, and several individuals, this program provides free civics and American history workshops to help prepare green card holders for the USCIS Naturalization Test. The civics portion of the test requires applicants

Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society

to study 100 questions about American history and government, and the Citizenship Project applies New-York Historical's "objects tell stories" pedagogy to those questions. Through object and visual inquiry, participants build a variety of skills, including observation, critical thinking, improved spoken language facility, and self-confidence.

For example, one of the questions on the test is, "Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?" To answer correctly, students only have to respond "Thomas Jefferson." In the Citizenship Project course, however, the participants explore Jefferson's complicated relationship with concepts of freedom through a runaway slave advertisement he posted two decades before penning the Declaration of Independence. This both complicates the heroic image of our Founding Fathers and illuminates the stories of enslaved people in the history of our nation's founding. It also gives aspiring citizens a deeper understanding of the current socio-political challenges faced by African Americans. The hope is that presenting history as a complex tale of personal stories will help participants remember what they have learned long beyond test day.

New-York Historical worked closely with the City University of New York and other community partners to ensure that the program was accessible to broad and diverse audiences. A full suite of Citizenship Project courses are offered on Saturdays, evenings, and weekdays, and at off-site partner locations. Each course includes 24 hours of test preparation, and students are welcome to participate in additional activities, including museum tours and practice interview sessions. New-York Historical has trained educators from other institutions across the nation in its pedagogical approach, including the Benjamin Harrison Presidential Site, the Taubman Museum of Art, the LBJ Foundation, the James Monroe Museum and Memorial Library, the Baltimore Museum of Industry, and the Senator John Heinz History Center.



Widely recognized by the press, the Citizenship Project also won the Museum Association of New York's Board of Directors Special Achievement Award; the American Alliance of Museums' Award for Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion; and the American Association for State and Local History's Leadership in History and History in Progress awards. USCIS has invited New-York Historical to participate in a pilot program to test questions from the revised citizenship exam, set to be released in 2020. When Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg learned about the Citizenship Project, she offered to preside over a naturalization ceremony at the New-York Historical Society.

New-York Historical's Citizenship Project and its collections are transforming lives. Participants learn the backstory of American history while supporting a new generation of citizens to be active, thoughtful stewards of democracy. As New-York Historical Society President and CEO Louise Mirrer said in a Mellon Foundation blog post about the Citizenship Project, "Much more than rote memorization, the program [is] a true learning experience about American history and our democratic institutions."

The New-York Historical Society hosted a naturalization ceremony in April 2018.



RESOURCES

Redmond Barnett, W. James Burns, and Elisa Phelps, "Audience Engagement Through Collections," *Exhibition*, Spring 2018.

Mia Nagawiecki, "Museums as Vital Resources for New Americans: The Citizenship Project," *Journal of Museum Education*, 2018.



Chief Curator Pam Schwartz (left) assists the mother of one of the Pulse victims as she collects her daughter's memorial cross in a ceremony where the artifacts were brought to the History Center for their conservation and long-term preservation.

Engaging with Audiences in Unexpected Ways

By Pam Schwartz

In February 2016, the fairly new staff of the Orange County Regional History Center in Orlando, Florida, realized our institution had a problem. Like many museums, we needed to decolonize. This was the impetus for developing a new and active strategy to engage our communities with our collections—or in some cases, our lack of collections.

When I curated my first exhibition at the museum with our local (virtual) GLBT History Museum, our collection had nothing to start from. We worked with the community to document and share their history, going through community members' closets and finding artifacts to serve as stepping-stones into the stories of our regional queer community. Following this model, we built collaborative exhibitions with a range of partners, including our local Jewish community, Vietnamese refugees, a weavers' group, and more.

In June 2016, during planning for the LGBTQ exhibition, our community faced what was then the largest mass shooting in modern American history at Pulse Nightclub. Within hours, I wrote a plan to collect and preserve the material memory of the event as well as the world's response to it. We began field collecting at the temporary memorial sites, our makeshift conservation tent in tow. Real-time collecting of what has become known as the One Orlando Collection offered our community on-site engagement with what, how, and why *their* local museum preserves *their* history. People stopped to tell us what they had left, what Pulse had meant to them, or just to show us their new commemorative Pulse tattoos.

In these moments, we weren't engaging our audience with our collections; they were engaging us with theirs. Through contemporary collecting in urgent response to a traumatic event, we curated the documentary record hand-in-hand *with* our community, not just for them or about them. Our role as a museum was rescripted as a place for conversation and healing through engaging with collections and the act of collecting.

As we emerged from this tragedy, we focused on engaging audiences we had not formerly attracted. Staff attended local events as reconnaissance missions, talking to representatives of the demographic group we were seeking to engage. Many individuals in the 21–45 age range said they like to be social, have drinks,

Photo courtesy of the Orange County Regional History Center

and enjoy one-of-a-kind experiences. Thus, “History in a Glass” was born. For this annual series, we select unique or offbeat themes illustrated by items in our collection. Staff then provide a nontraditional presentation: for instance, a dramatic reading of the history of a brutish tyrant swan now displayed in a strange glass box or a Civil War surgeon’s kit illustrated through a one-act play written and performed by staff.

Area craft bartenders compete to design a cocktail based on the theme. Participants taste test and vote for their favorites based on creativity, flavor, and relation of the ingredients to the story or collection theme. The winners of each competition advance to the championship, and the winner takes home a collections-inspired trophy. The event has garnered a nearly cult-like following, bringing many new people (and memberships) into our museum and into contact with the collection.

Next spring we begin renovations on our fully reimagined permanent exhibitions. Collections-driven narratives created with the community have greatly shifted the museum’s historical perspectives, and the multiple viewpoints shared are now more reflective of

our entire community’s experience. The new exhibits will be Spanish-English bilingual and accessible to varied learning styles, abilities, and needs.

Audience engagement with our collections has become an eternal game, not to mention an education in the power of contemporaneously curating objects and oral histories. How do we put some of our most obscure objects to work or shed new light on an old favorite? We are keeping our collections at the heart of our mission by constantly seeking responsible ways to break down barriers between audience access and care.

Redmond W. Barnett is a historian and museum consultant in the Seattle area; **Elisa Phelps** is vice president and chief curatorial officer at the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis, Indiana; **Jennifer Schantz** is executive vice president and chief operating officer at the New-York Historical Society in New York City; and **Pam Schwartz** is chief curator at the Orange County Regional History Center in Orlando, Florida.

Dressed for the occasion, a guest enjoys a themed craft cocktail based on the story of Billy the Swan, an artifact in the History Center’s collection, during a “History in a Glass” event.



Photo courtesy of the Orange County Regional History Center

Speak Up for Museums in 2020!

Have your elected officials heard from you lately? As other causes make their voices heard in 2020, it's critical we make our case and speak with one voice about the essential role of museums in our communities and how public policy decisions affect museums.

If we are not at the table, we could be on the table.

Constituent visits from museum advocates like you have a greater influence on legislators than any other group or strategy. You can help ensure your state is represented and your legislators hear from you by attending Museums Advocacy Day February 24–25 in Washington, DC!

Museums Advocacy Day is a unique opportunity to network with peers from your region, hear from federal agency and nonprofit leaders, and build your own leadership skills. Get timely, insider information from policy leaders and the tools and information you need to be a successful advocate for museums. Whether you are a new or seasoned advocate, you will get all the preparation you need to effectively make the case for museums in 2020—on Capitol Hill and with your state and local elected officials. Unite with museum colleagues from across the country as one voice to reaffirm



Museums Advocacy Day participants seize the moment in the halls of US Congress.

our value, collective contributions, and aspirations.

Get inspired by video testimonials from past participants, get the tools to advocate online, and register on our website at bit.ly/mad2020.

Reimagining the Museum: Conference of the Americas Dazzles Attendees

On November 20–23, 800 museum professionals from 22 countries were warmly welcomed to Oaxaca, Mexico, for the sold-out Reimagining the Museum: Conference of the Americas. The biannual conference, launched in 2015 by AAM and the Fundación

TyPA, was hosted this year in partnership with Fundación Alfredo Harp Helú, Museo de la Filatelia, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), Museo Interactivo de Economía (MIDE), and Papalote Museo del Niño. The conference indulged all the senses with riveting content and spectacular events amid the natural splendor of Oaxaca, one of the most culturally and environmentally diverse regions in Mexico.

Attendees were challenged to reexamine museum practice and coalesce around a shared understanding in addressing timely social issues and the provocative questions they engender. What are

potential roles and responsibilities for museums in deepening the understanding of and context for migration today? What new directions in museology can we cultivate to nurture respectful, inclusive, and trusting relationships between museums and the living cultures of the Americas? How does the colonization of knowledge and power and its vestiges of racism and eurocentrism influence behaviors, perceptions, and actions?

As always, the conference employed a variety of innovative session formats. The recipient of “the crown” for the most visionary

project was the Museo del Westside in San Antonio, Texas, an institution that is providing the tools and guidance for documenting the culture and traditions of a vibrant Latino neighborhood being uprooted through urban development and gentrification. Meanwhile, a mock trial offered opposing perspectives to this question: Do museums that adapt to the needs and demands of tourism put the collections and traditions of the cultures they exhibit at risk?

Attendees were energized by lively evening events that included participating in a special “calenda”

(a traditional Oaxacan celebratory street parade) that included a dazzling fireworks display and an exuberant dance party held in centerfield of the Eduardo Vasconcelos Baseball Stadium.

Follow the #elmuseoreimaginado hashtag on Facebook and Twitter to join the conversation. In the near future, session videos captioned in Spanish and English and a conference summary will be made available on the AAM website (aam-us.org/programs/about-aam/conference-of-the-americas/) and the location of the 2021 host site will be announced.



Dancers bedecked in a kaleidoscope of colors delight Conference of the Americas participants.

Farewell to Two Accreditation Commissioners

The AAM Board of Directors, leadership, and staff extend their immense appreciation to Kenneth Schutz and Lourdes Ramos for their volunteer service to AAM as they conclude their terms on the Accreditation Commission. Schutz, the Dr. William Huizingh executive director of the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix,



Lourdes Ramos

Arizona, and Ramos, president and CEO of the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, California, were among the first class of commissioners appointed after the new, more streamlined accreditation process launched in 2014. Through several hundred accreditation reviews done over a dozen meetings in the past five years, they have made an important contribution to individual museums, the Accreditation Program, and the US museum field. We look forward to their continued commitment to excellence and their involvement with the American Alliance of Museums, including as active peer reviewers.

Giving Tuesday Nurtures Career Development

AAM extends gratitude to the generous supporters who on #GivingTuesday funded two Alliance Scholarships for the 2020 Annual Meeting in San Francisco! This vital program gives underrepresented museum professionals access to the



Kenneth Schutz

knowledge and connections they need to thrive in the museum field. You, too, can boost a career or support AAM's mission to champion museums and nurture excellence through a tax-deductible gift made at aam-us.org/donate. We know a stronger museum field starts with you. Go ahead and pay it forward this new year.

“You, too, can boost a career or support AAM’s mission to champion museums and nurture excellence through a tax-deductible gift made at aam-us.org/donate.”



New Jobs



Kelly Brox, *Community Engagement Manager*, Cahoon Museum of American Art, Cotuit, MA



Michael Norris, *Executive Director*, Carpenters' Hall, Philadelphia, PA



Beth Redmond-Jones, *Vice President of Exhibitions*, Monterey Bay Aquarium, CA



Ann Fortescue, *President and Executive Director*, International Museum of Art & Science, McAllen, TX



Hunter O'Hanian, *Executive Director*, Stonewall National Museum and Archives, Fort Lauderdale, FL



Ashley Stoneburner, *Vice President and Chief Development Officer*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, IN



Victoria Gerard, *Vice President of Programs and Collections*, Bowers Museum, Santa Ana, CA



Lisa Purcell, *Senior Vice President, Education, Development and Community Outreach*, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Nashville, TN



Matthew Toland, *Director*, Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, Schaumburg, IL



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Retirement



After more than 30 years of service, **Carol (Machado) Majahad** will retire as executive director of the North Andover Historical Society board effective January 1, 2020. The society has relied on her guidance, management, and most of all her passion for history, especially North Andover's. Generations of schoolchildren have visited Johnson Cottage and learned their local history through Majahad's efforts. She will transition to a part-time position, working on the expansion and consolidation of the society's educational programs.



Edward L. Deci, the director and president of the Monhegan Museum of Art & History in Maine, announced his retirement on September 30, 2019, after 36 years in key leadership roles at the museum. Deci will continue to play an integral role at the museum as the president of the Board of Trustees. Jennifer Pye, the museum's chief curator, and Robert Stahl, the museum's associate director and director of the James Fitzgerald Legacy, will take over as co-directors of the museum.

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Kudos



Andrew Stout, director of the Florence County Museum, was recently awarded the Museum Leadership Award by the Southeastern Museums Conference (SEMC). Created in 1994, this award recognizes mid-career museum professionals who have shown significant advancement within the profession by leadership in museum activities at their institution, within the museum profession as a whole, and especially in the Southeast region. To be eligible for the award, professionals must have 10 years of experience as a museum staff member and a minimum of five years immediate past tenure with a museum in the SEMC region.

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In Memoriam



Marlene Chambers, who was senior editor and head of publications at the Denver Art Museum for 30 years, died on July 21, 2019. During her tenure, the museum put out world-class publications, and she became an influential thinker on creating interpretive materials to engage visitors in positive museum experiences. Chambers published a series of seminal articles on the need to change the work of museums and to allow visitors to do their own meaning-making. She received AAM's John Cotton Dana Award for Leadership in 1996 and considered it the capstone of her career.

Peter Heyl Hassrick, an expert in the art of the American West, died on October 25, 2019. He began his career as curator of collections at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas. His subsequent roles included director of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center (now the Buffalo Bill Center of the West) in Cody, Wyoming; founding director of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico; founding director of the Charles Russell Center for the Study of Western American Art at the University of Oklahoma in Norman; and director of the Petrie Institute of American Western Art at the Denver Art Museum in Colorado. Along the way, he wrote 25 books and dozens of scholarly articles, lectured widely, and curated shows that toured museums across the country.



Danielle Rice, museum educator and director, died on September 12, 2019. She was among the female educators who rose to leadership roles in the 1980s and who eventually became executive directors. She served successively as director of education at the Wadsworth Atheneum, the National Gallery of Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In recognition of her leadership, she received the 1988 AAM Award for Excellence in Education and was named the 1996 Outstanding Museum Art Educator by the Pennsylvania Art Education Association. From 2005 to 2013, she led the Delaware Art Museum through a challenging financial situation while sustaining high-quality exhibitions, programs, and collections care. Most recently she directed the graduate program in museum leadership at Drexel University, sharing her wisdom and contacts with a new generation of museum professionals.

REFLECTION



What was it stirred the bough?...
There was no breath of wind!...
Why did the aspens tremble
In the quiet of sunset?...

Was it the shadow of trees
That slipped softly
Over the hill
Into the cañon?...

Then I knew, knew
In the breath of the wild rose...
Knew in the wild, sweet fragrance
Flooding the trail
That Beauty was passing...
Diana...the lovely and swift...
With her lean, gray, phantom hounds!...

Excerpted from *The Unseen* by Anne Brigman

The image and poem appear in the book *Anne Brigman: A Visionary in Modern Photography*, winner of The Francis Smyth-Ravenel Prize for Excellence in the 2019 AAM Publication Design Competition. For a list of other winners, visit bit.ly/2019AAMpubcomp.



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