

ENGAGEMENT
COMMUNITY
ACCESS +
INTERACTION

MUSEUM

AUDIENCES LIGHT THE WAY FORWARD



HELPING MUSEUMS OPEN. RESPONSIBLY.



MuseumSigns, MuseumRails, and Q-Cord products are found in museums around the world to guide and engage visitors. The new Hand Sanitizer Stations blend seamlessly with other 10-31 products, using the same superior quality, USA-made manufacturing processes. Everything from Art Display Essentials can be easily modified to meet your specific needs. And with over 35 years of experience partnering with museums and institutions on their spaces and exhibitions, we're here to help with your opening or re-opening plans.



10-31.COM

800.862.9869

Your mission is central to ours.

Your support makes our work possible.

Ensure museum advocates have a seat at the table when Congress makes decisions that affect our field.

Donate to advocacy and Museums Advocacy Day 2021.

Provide critical support for museums during the pandemic, including free reopening and recovery resources. **Make a year-end gift to support the field's greatest needs.**

Plan for the future of the museum field through research and trends watching. **Donate to the Center for the Future of Museums.**

The events of 2020 show that our mission to champion museums and nurture excellence is more important than ever.

Give today to strengthen the museum field
aam-us.org/donate



**American
Alliance of
Museums**

CONTENTS



FEATURES

- 26** Emerging from Crisis
One of the largest audience research studies aims to help cultural institutions remain relevant through the pandemic and beyond.
By Arthur Cohen
- 32** The Digital Awakening
Global disruption has demonstrated the need for a digital-first approach to online engagement.
By Nik Honeysett
- 36** Building Audience with Intentionality
The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is reimagining how it serves its African American community.
By Jamie O. Bosket
- 42** Setting a Higher Bar
Since its inception, the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum has focused on universal accessibility.
By Josh Barr
- 48** How Might We Transform?
The Interaction Lab at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum seeks to re-envision visitor experience.
By Rachel Ginsberg and Carolyn Royston

DEPARTMENTS

- 5** From the President and CEO
- 6** By the Numbers
- 8** First Look
- 14** Point of View
The Museum Audience of the Future
- 18** **COVID-19 Resource Guide**
- 54** Alliance in Action
- 56** Tributes and Transitions
- 57** Discussion Guide
- 60** Reflection

Editor's note:
The article "Rising to the Challenge" in the Sep/Oct 2020 issue incorrectly refers to Dumbarton House as Dumbarton Oaks, which is a separate institution. We regret the error.

Cover:
Interaction Lab workshop participants bodystorming after hours at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in December 2019 beneath the *curiosity cloud* installation by mischer'traxler studio, on view in the "Nature—Cooper Hewitt Design Triennial." Photo by Nikola Bradonjic



AM&P
EXCEL
BRONZE WINNER
2020



ERCO

Eclipse

The art of illuminating – with
28,000 possibilities



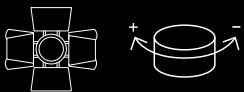
**Control your lights
using a smartphone**

without additional
hardware.



Experience comfort

with innovative
darklight lenses.



Set the focus

with easily adjustable
light distribution.



Bring colors to life

with infinitely
adjustable light color.



Discover your Eclipse spotlight:
www.erco.com/eclipse



MUSEUM

A BENEFIT OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Dean Phelus

MANAGING EDITOR

Gayle Bennett

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Cecelia Walls, Ember Farber, Elizabeth Merritt, Andrew Plumley, Ryan Bourke

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Team of Creatives, LLC

ALLIANCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Chair (2020–2022)

Chevy Humphrey, Arizona Science Center

Vice Chair (2020–2021)

Berit N. Durler, San Diego Zoo Global

Treasurer (2020–2021)

Jorge Zamanillo, HistoryMiami Museum

Immediate Past Chair (2020–2022)

Kippen de Alba Chu, Fort Worth Museum of Science and History

TERM OF OFFICE 2018–2021

Susana Smith Bautista, AltaMed Art Collection

Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko, Illinois State Museum

Nathan Richie, Golden History Museum and Park

Ruth Shelly, Portland Children's Museum

Stephanie Stebich, Smithsonian American Art Museum

Karol Wight, The Corning Museum of Glass

ADVERTISING

Carol Nettles
aamad@adboomadvertising.com
404-347-1755

ALLIANCE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Laura L. Lott

TERM OF OFFICE 2019–2022

Robert M. Davis, America's Black Holocaust Museum

Marcia DeWitt, Hillwood Estate, Museum and Garden

Kelly McKinley, Bay Area Discovery Museum

James Pepper Henry, First Americans Museum

Julie Stein, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture

TERM OF OFFICE 2020–2023

Devon Akmon, Science Gallery Detroit

Carrie Rebora Barratt, The New York Botanical Garden

Frederic Bertley, Center of Science and Industry

Alison Rempel Brown, Science Museum of Minnesota

Christine A. Donovan, Northern Trust Company

Charles L. Katzenmeyer, Field Museum

MUSEUM (ISSN 0027-4089)

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020, VOLUME 99, NO. 5

PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY (J/F, M/A, M/J, J/A, S/O, N/D)
BY THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS

2451 CRYSTAL DRIVE, SUITE 1005, ARLINGTON, VA 22202; 202-289-1818; FAX 202-289-6578; WWW.AAM-US.ORG.

Annual subscription rate is \$38. Copies are mailed to all members. Single copy is \$7. Overseas airmail is an additional \$45. Membership in the Alliance includes \$22 from annual membership dues applicable to a subscription to MUSEUM, except for students and retirees. (This notice is required by the US Postal Service.) POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MUSEUM, 2451 Crystal Drive, Suite 1005, Arlington, VA 22202. Copyright 2018, American Alliance of Museums. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine or its cover may be reproduced without written consent of the copyright proprietor. MUSEUM is indexed in The Art Index, which is published quarterly and available in public libraries. The magazine is available from ProQuest in the following formats: microform, electronic and paper. Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Alliance. Preferred Periodical postage paid at Arlington, VA, and additional mailing offices. Printed in the US by Lane Press, Burlington, VT.



twitter.com/aamers



facebook.com/americanmuseums



linkedin.com/groups/American-Alliance-Museums-2965314



instagram.com/aamersofficial

Thanks to our Member Discount Providers



HUNTINGTON T. BLOCK
INSURANCE AGENCY, INC.





Together We Will Recover

As I write this in early September, just over six months since COVID-19 began shuttering our museums, I look out at a world of unprecedented and unpredictable change. In a matter of months, we have been confronted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the systemic racism that has plagued us for centuries—not to mention a financial crisis and a divisive national election.

I am heartened, however, that museums have embodied their roles as community anchors like never before. In the spring, when first responders were missing the personal protective equipment (PPE) they needed to be safe at work, museums stepped up, donating PPE despite the financial strains they were under. As community members began grappling with the mental and emotional repercussions of physical distancing, museums offered their outdoor spaces for psychological respite. And as teachers and parents alike scour the internet for curricula, lesson plans, and teaching tools, museums are offering high-quality, engaging, and affordable educational material to help students get through the school year in front of computer screens. During every phase of the pandemic thus far, museums have been quietly mobilizing to fill critical gaps.

While you have been providing these crucial services to your communities, the Alliance has been advocating for you. Over the past six months, we have spent more than 1,600 hours advocating and lobbying Congress for financial relief for our field, including federal support for museums and museum workers. We have created and collected nearly 450 free resources to help you respond to the pandemic, and they are being accessed by thousands of website visitors each day. And we have worked to receive more than 900 local, national, and international television, radio, digital, and print

media placements that communicate the dire impacts of the pandemic on the field, correct public misconceptions about museum funding, and highlight the need for community support as museums fight to recover.

This year has tested our mettle. It has been painful, illuminating, and awe-inspiring. It has also demonstrated our collective work in action: when our communities hurt, museums respond. And when museums respond, the Alliance ensures the world knows it. If you can, please consider supporting the Alliance as we close out the year. Your generosity and your membership make our work possible.

While I cannot predict what the coming months will bring, I know that our communities need their museums. They need trusted places that bring us together; lift up different voices, stories, and truths; and ask us to look differently at the world around us. Know that you are part of an Alliance working to move our field forward—and that together, we can find resiliency, rebuild, and recover.



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

Building Museum Audiences

97%

Percentage of Americans who think museums are educational assets for their communities.

53%

Percentage of museum-goers who say their families have an access need (e.g., physical disability, autism spectrum disorder, aging needs, etc.).

28%

Percentage of museum-goers who think museums should always be neutral . . . no matter what.

27%

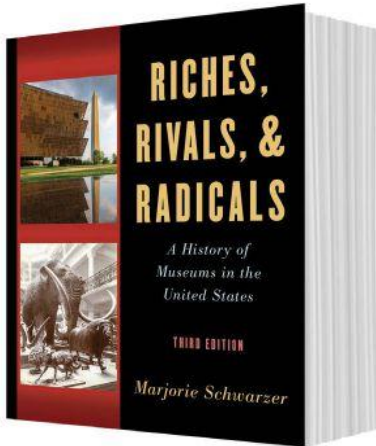
Percentage of museum-goers who proactively want museums to be more inclusive.

Sources: Top: "Museums and Public Opinion," AAM/Wilkening Consulting; all others 2020 AAM/Wilkening Consulting Annual Survey of Museum-Goers

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



NEW RESOURCES FOR _____ MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS



RICHES, RIVALS, AND RADICALS

A History of Museums in the United States

Third Edition

By Marjorie Schwarzer

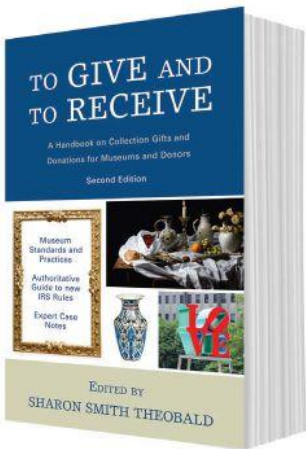
This beautiful full-color book tells the stories behind the people and events that have transformed America's museums from their beginnings into today's vibrant cultural institutions. Updates include material on digital curation, emergent exhibitions about civil rights, immersive museum environments, and more.

October 2020 • 296 pages

978-1-5381-2807-7 • \$65.00 • Paper

978-1-5381-2806-0 • \$125.00 • Cloth

978-1-5381-2808-4 • \$61.50 • eBook



TO GIVE AND TO RECEIVE

A Handbook on Collection Gifts and Donations for Museums and Donors

Second Edition

Edited by Sharon Smith Theobald

"This is a smart practical guide to navigating museum donations. It provides a comprehensive summary of collections gift management, as well as highlights best practices for museum professionals. I look forward to this addition to my resource library."

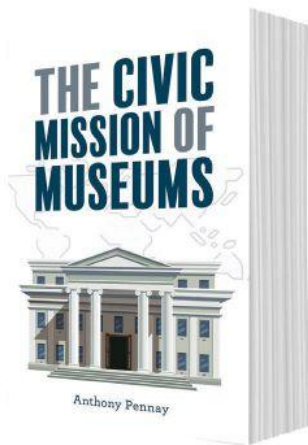
—Kate Brueggemann, Vice President, Development, Adler Planetarium

October 2020 • 120 pages

978-1-5381-2884-8 • \$39.00 • Paper

978-1-5381-2883-1 • \$84.00 • Cloth

978-1-5381-2885-5 • \$37.00 • eBook



THE CIVIC MISSION OF MUSEUMS

By Anthony Pennay

"Pennay's timely writing reminds us that we, as museum workers and leaders, have a duty to support a civil society through our educational efforts and the sharing of our museum spaces for the civic process. We can all benefit from this refresher course on civics which also serves to enable museums and their staffs to do better for society."

—Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko, director, Illinois State Museum

December 2020 • 152 pages

978-1-5381-3185-5 • \$40.00 • Paper

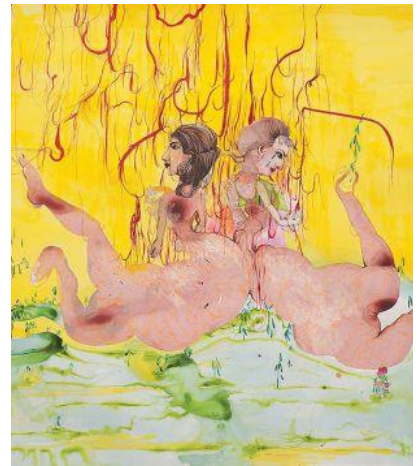
978-1-5381-3184-8 • \$80.00 • Cloth

978-1-5381-3186-2 • \$38.00 • eBook

SAVE 20% when you order at
www.rowman.com with promo code
AAMPRESS20

**ROWMAN &
LITTLEFIELD**





Holocaust Museum Houston

The US premiere of “Mandela: Struggle for Freedom” explores the fight for justice and human dignity in South Africa—and its relevance to issues of today. The exhibition replicates Mandela’s eight-foot by seven-foot prison cell, which, when entered, becomes a digital theater whose walls tell a story of repression and resilience. Other exhibition highlights include a 16-foot-high “wall of laws” based solely on skin color and original artifacts, including police riot gear, tools of hard labor, letters written by Mandela, and segregated swimming and toilet signs.

Location: Houston, TX

Dates: through Jan. 3, 2021

Partners: Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Apartheid Museum

Learn more: hmh.org/exhibitions/mandela-struggle-for-freedom-2020-09-11/

Hunter Museum of American Art

“The F Word: We Mean Female!” recognizes the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage in the United States by celebrating many of the works in the museum’s collection by female artists. Highlighting large installation pieces, many of which are rarely on view, the exhibition will include a range of artworks with a mix of subjects, styles, and media. Featured artists include Lesley Dill, Miriam Schapiro, Kara Walker, Faith Ringgold, and Beverly Semmes.

Location: Chattanooga, TN

Dates: through Jan. 10, 2021

Learn more: huntermuseum.org/exhibition/the-f-word-we-mean-female

Frist Art Museum

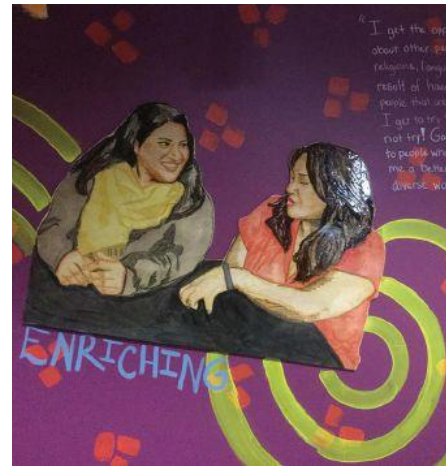
“Rina Banerjee: Make Me a Summary of the World” is the first major survey of Banerjee’s work in the United States that includes large-scale installations, sculptures, and paintings produced over two decades. Together, the 33 works in the exhibition show the artist’s ongoing desire to summarize the complexity, beauty, and sense of disequilibrium that can arise in a world undergoing constant fragmentation and renewal.

Location: Nashville, TN

Dates: through Jan. 10, 2021

Learn more: fristartmuseum.org/calendar/detail/rina-banerjee

Graeme Williams; Lesley Dill, *Rise*; Rina Banerjee, *Learn of their discovery...*
© Rina Banerjee, image courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels



Tanja Softić; Untold Lands; Kathy S. Copesey; Jo-Anne Baxter

Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston

“Dis/placements: Revisitations of Home” is an online exhibition featuring 10 artists whose works deal with issues of displacement from their ancestral homeland in various capacities. Artists were paired with writers who have offered their own reflections on the work and its relationship to the concepts of home and displacement. When taken together, this collection of work provides an opportunity to consider the traits and aspects that are both similar and jarringly disparate—from Asia to Africa to Europe and the Middle East.

Location: Charleston, SC

Dates: through Dec. 12

Learn more: displacements.org

Channel Islands Maritime Museum

“Fragile Waters: Predator or Prey?” focuses on the state of great white sharks and features the art of photographer Ralph Clevenger and painter Kathy Copesey. The exhibition highlights why these predator creatures are critical to the health of the oceans and the planet.

Location: Oxnard, CA

Dates: through Dec. 21

Learn more: cimmvc.org/whats-on/

Boston Children’s Museum

“Warm & Fuzzy Feels” art installation by Chanel Thervil explores the tenderness, care, joy, and love that is generated by friendship between women from different cultural backgrounds. The exhibition combines portraits of friends, textiles, and shapes to mirror the beauty that is created when differences are accepted and celebrated.

Location: Boston, MA

Dates: through Jan. 15, 2021

Learn more: bostonchildrensmuseum.org

What’s New at Your Museum?

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



**Imagine
an America**
NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM

ImagineAnAmerica.org
#YourVoteYourVoice

National Museum of Women in the Arts

Cut, folded, torn, glued, burned or embossed, paper becomes a transformational art medium in “Paper Routes—Women to Watch 2020,” which presents the work of 22 emerging and underrepresented contemporary women artists from around the world. Some artists highlight the delicate properties of paper through thousands of meticulous cuts, while others create surprisingly dense and monumental sculptures.

Location: Washington, DC

Dates: through Jan. 18, 2021

Learn more: nmwa.org/exhibitions/paper-routes-women-to-watch-2020/

Illinois State Museum

“Journal of a Plague Year: Illinois in 2020” showcases submissions from the museum’s COVID-19 collecting initiative and features the photography of local artist Zach Adams. In April, the museum launched “Share Your Story: Illinois in the COVID-19 Pandemic,” a collecting initiative asking the people of Illinois to share their pandemic experiences. The exhibition features highlights from the entries received and will reflect new submissions as they come into the museum.

Location: Springfield, IL

Dates: through December

Learn more: illinoisstatemuseum.org

National Civil Rights Museum

The National Civil Rights Museum has launched ImagineAnAmerica, a digital platform that heightens awareness of the privilege and necessity of voting. ImagineAnAmerica is anchored by an interactive website with a voting rights timeline, voter statistics, and real-time and state-by-state information about access to voting. The website encourages viewers to share their stories using the hashtag #ImagineAnAmerica or #YourVoteYourVoice.

Location: Memphis, TN

Learn more: ImagineAnAmerica.org

Paola Podestà Marti, Vergara Palace Cornice, photo by Calliphotography; photo by Zach Adams, courtesy of the Illinois State Museum; National Civil Rights Museum

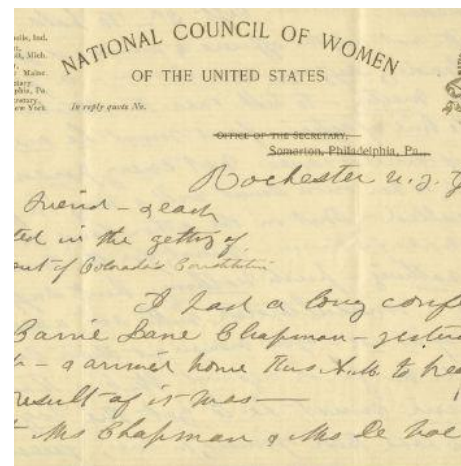


Creating unforgettable experiences and environments that inspire our clients, their audiences and our team since 1972.



EQUAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE

The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration



Washington State Historical Society

The Washington State Historical Society received the American Association for State and Local History’s Award of Excellence for the 2019 exhibition “Unlocking McNeil’s Past: The Prison, The Place, The People.” The exhibition presented the history of McNeil Island and the facility that first officially opened there as a territorial prison in 1875. When the state’s correctional center on McNeil Island closed in 2011, it was the last prison in the nation only accessible by air or water.

Location: Tacoma, WA

Learn more: aaslh.org/2020-award-winners/

Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County

The Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC) earned two Silver Addy awards for the “What Blows YOUR Mind?” campaign at the 2020 American Advertising Awards. The campaign encourages audiences of all ages and interests to explore, connect with, and share what inspires them at NHMLAC: from beautiful butterflies to long-legged arachnids, shiny minerals to charismatic mammals, curious dioramas to iconic architecture.

Location: Los Angeles, CA

Learn more: nhm.org/press/natural-history-museums-los-angeles-county-campaign-blows-minds-site-and-home

History Colorado

Through the Digital Volunteer Network, History Colorado now has transcribed documents from well-known suffragists who fought to remove the barrier of gender discrimination at the polls. The items document the work of the successful 1893 Colorado popular referendum campaign, showing the personal and professional relationships that national leaders such as Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, and Carrie Chapman Catt built in Colorado to help the state’s suffragists campaign for the vote.

Location: Denver, CO

Learn more: historycolorado.org/transcribing-womens-suffrage-colorado

**In turbulent times, museums
need timely audience research
they can count on.**

***We're here
to help.***



Find our latest data releases at:

**[wilkeningconsulting.com/
data-stories](https://wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories)**



**American
Alliance of
Museums**



WilkeningConsulting

audience research | knowledge curation

For custom research results about your audience, enroll in the 2021 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers.
More information can be found at wilkeningconsulting.com.



The Museum Audience of the Future

A conversation with urbanist Richard Florida about how
the creative class has changed cities.



Richard Florida is one of the world's leading urbanists. A professor at the University of Toronto's School of Cities and Rotman School of Management, he's also the best-selling author of the books *The Rise of the Creative Class* and, most recently, *The New Urban Crisis*. Here he shares his thoughts on the creative class, the new urban crisis, and the role of museums as community anchors.

Who is the creative class and how influential have they been in transforming work, leisure, and community?

The creative class professions span science, medicine and engineering, design and education, finance and business management, media and entertainment, and the arts. Though the members of the creative class do not share one singular identity, they are united by an ethos that values creativity, individuality, authenticity, and merit. The real positive force that is going to carry us forward is human creativity, and the creative class is leading this charge; this is especially true as we look to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are more than 42 million members of the creative class in the US. They are responsible for 50 percent of wages and income in the US as well as more than 70 percent of all US income. Worldwide, our research indicates there are 300 million creative workers.

In terms of their impact, they have helped transform how we work and are the drivers of our local economies. And because of their large economic impact,

they've had a hand in driving which products and services across the world flourish. They generally are the early adopters of technologies. Simply put, they are thinkers, doers, and influencers.

What have been some positive impacts of the creative class in urbanism?

Cities are the basic platforms of economic progress. If large-scale companies and organizations were the platforms for the industrial economy, cities are the platform for the creative economy. They are the social and economic organizing units of our time and are now the containers of creativity. We cannot uncouple the rise and rebirth of cities and the growth of the world's creative economy. The two are very much related. Today, more than 85 percent of the US population lives and works in cities, which now account for approximately 90 percent of the country's economic output.

In an effort to attract and retain the creative class, cities across the world have made investments to make them more livable, healthy, and appealing. From the smallest of communities to the largest of metro areas, we now see cities investing more heavily in placemaking, a hands-on approach for residents to collectively improve a neighborhood, city, or region; community public spaces; arts and culture; education systems; and so much more. Now, the real challenge of our time is to ensure that we not only build more creative cities and communities, but ones that are more inclusive and equitable.

What have been some of the unintended consequences in the rise of the creative class?

As we have seen across the country, the rise in the desirability of cities by the creative class has had an impact on affordability, class divides, and policy challenges like gentrification. Much of this can be attributed to the buying and consumption power of the creative class. Creative workers earn substantially more than service or blue-collar workers. Likewise, research suggests that some of the most creative and innovative cities in the world are also the most unequal. As I discussed in *The New Urban Crisis*, these are effects of "winner-take-all urbanism." And, as we look at the impact of COVID-19 across the world, these effects have been exacerbated and exposed like never before. We can use this current crisis as a "reset" moment to build a more inclusive and resilient urban future. This will require us to explore and test intentional actions that can ensure that we're better managing the externalities of this growing desire for urban community, such as gentrification/displacement of residents and segregation.

How would you characterize the new urban crisis, and has the creative class played a role in it?

The new urban crisis is not a crisis of urban decay, but really one of urban success in many ways. We know that cities are the great engines of innovation and creativity, and on the flip side, the urban challenges, like gentrification and inequality, are the direct

“Museums are our community gathering spaces where we explore our differences, learn from our past, and plan for our future.”



externalities of affluence that often follow the creative economy. I define this as the new urban crisis, which is quite different from the old urban crisis of the 1960s and 1970s that resulted in the abandonment of cities and urban communities.

To address this new urban crisis, we'll have to do several things: (1) reform our building and land use planning to ensure that urban clustering—creating ecosystems to support growth—can work for everyone; (2) invest in the infrastructure needed to spur density and clustering and limit costly and inefficient sprawl; (3) build more affordable rental housing; and (4) expand the middle class by turning low-wage service jobs (especially those requiring frontline workers) into household-supporting wages.

What has been the impact of the urban crisis on the suburban and exurban landscape?

The new urban crisis is having a significant impact on suburban communities too. It is one of the key challenges impacting metro areas across the world. Suburbia has long been home to the wealthiest communities in the US, but now its inequalities increasingly rival those of cities.

Today, there are more poor people in the suburbs than there are in cities—17 million versus 13.5 million. Some of this suburban poverty is being imported from the cities as displaced families seek more affordable places to live, but it is also because many suburban residents have fallen out of the middle class, losing jobs or being forced to take on low-wage service-based work. These challenges are why suburban and urban communities cannot combat the new urban crisis by going it alone. Metro areas have to work together across geographies to identify improved pathways of opportunity, such as tech skills development, and new avenues for developing more affordable housing.

What has been most revealing to you about cities during this moment of economic turbulence, social unrest, and the coronavirus crisis?

The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced the divides of race and class that we see in our cities. It's shown us that it is not enough to build an innovative economy. We have to build economies and communities that are more inclusive and resilient. We've seen how people of color are dying

at higher rates from COVID-19 than white populations, across all age demographics. We've seen how frontline service workers are more exposed to the virus. As creative and knowledge workers work remotely, more than 30 million frontline service workers are exposed every day. The combination of the COVID-19 crisis and the Black Lives Matter protests have created a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rebuild our communities better and to address the history of racial division, class divides, and economic injustice.

Who do you envision as the predominant audiences for museums/arts in urban and non-urban areas in the future?

Museums and arts are critical for all demographics. Arts and culture avenues are how we build and create community and identity in our cities—large and small alike. Museums are our community gathering spaces where we explore our differences, learn from our past, and plan for our future. That said, as we examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we're going to have to come together to ensure that we protect these creative spaces from disappearing. We'll need new partnership models across sectors that marshal funding and expertise to keep our cultural scenes alive in the short term and thriving in the long term.

What are the most critical questions museums should be asking to better understand the changes in and interests of

their potential audiences? What existing data sources could they reference to inform decisions?

The key question that museums have to ask themselves is what role they see for their institutions in helping to create community and build more inclusive, equitable bridges among community members for the future. After the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, residents will be hungry for authentic opportunities to connect with one another; museums and arts/culture institutions have an opportunity to play a vital role here. We've all become more keenly aware of how critical public space is to our well-being.

In terms of research, my advice for museums is the same as for that of cities/communities: talk to your residents (and not just the usual suspects); get out in the community through forums, meetings, surveys, and roundtables to better understand what residents expect and want from their cultural institutions.

How can museums in their role as community anchors contribute to fostering more livable, equitable, and inclusive places?

While typical examples of anchor institutions include large universities, hospitals, and medical centers that quite literally anchor

urban centers, other powerful anchors such as cultural institutions have the capacity and resources to wield influence on communities. From programming to local employment and purchasing, arts and cultural institutions can help cities build inclusive places. But this will require a commitment that is built into the strategic plans and operations of these institutions that include tangible goals, objectives, and metrics. By organizing resources and leveraging capabilities, anchors like museums can help turn our most innovative and most productive cities into inclusive and prosperous places for everyone.

Curate Your Future with an M.A. in Museum Professions



Become an in-demand museum professional with an **M.A. in Museum Professions from Seton Hall.**

Focus your studies in **Museum Registration, Education, Management** or **Exhibition Development** while learning to keep audiences inspired through innovative courses in technologies, activism and leadership.



COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION
AND THE ARTS
Graduate Studies

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

www.shu.edu/Museum/AAM

(973) 761-9490 • CGS@shu.edu

400 South Orange Ave. • South Orange, NJ 07079

Keep your exhibits powered on!

Freetouch™ instantly converts touchscreen interactives to 100% touchless experiences.

Freetouch is the easiest way to enable safe and secure touchless interaction.

No new hardware or software development required!

SAVE 10% WITH CODE
AAM2020
THROUGH JANUARY 2021

INSTALLED IN MINUTES

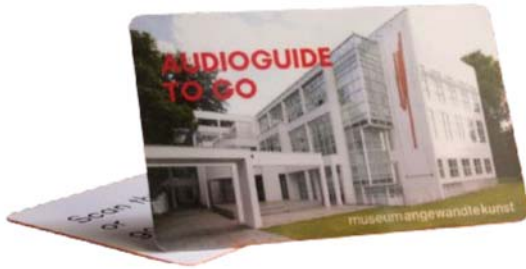
MASTERED IN SECONDS

TOUCHLESS INDEFINITELY

Learn more at getfreetouch.com



A **COVID-proof** digital audio guiding system that works with visitors' own smartphones and is also **profitable**



Nubart



1. Pre-recorded audioguides
 2. Group-guiding system
 3. Audio-Video synchronization
- ALL IN ONE !**

No apps to download, no dedicated devices.

Just a beautiful, customized, non-transferable, reusable card that your visitors keep!

We also offer revenue-share agreements, incl. content production, with no upfront costs!



Request free samples and a quote:
www.nubart.us info@nubart.us

MUSEUM QUALITY AIR



Clean+Green™
Dynamic®

V8
AIR CLEANING
SYSTEM

**ASHRAE guidelines for COVID-19 suggesting
MERV 13 or better air filtration makes the
Dynamic V8 Air Cleaning System an ideal
choice for existing buildings**

- Better IAQ with MERV 15 performance.
- Removes ultrafine particles, odors and VOCs, without ionizing or Ozone generation.
- Very low pressure drop enables retrofitting into HVAC systems not designed for high-efficiency air filtration.
- Highest dust holding capacity on the market (10 times higher than standard cartridge and bag filters).
- Extend filter change-out intervals from months to YEARS.
- 2/3 less fan energy than MERV 14 filters.

Dynamic®
Air Quality Solutions

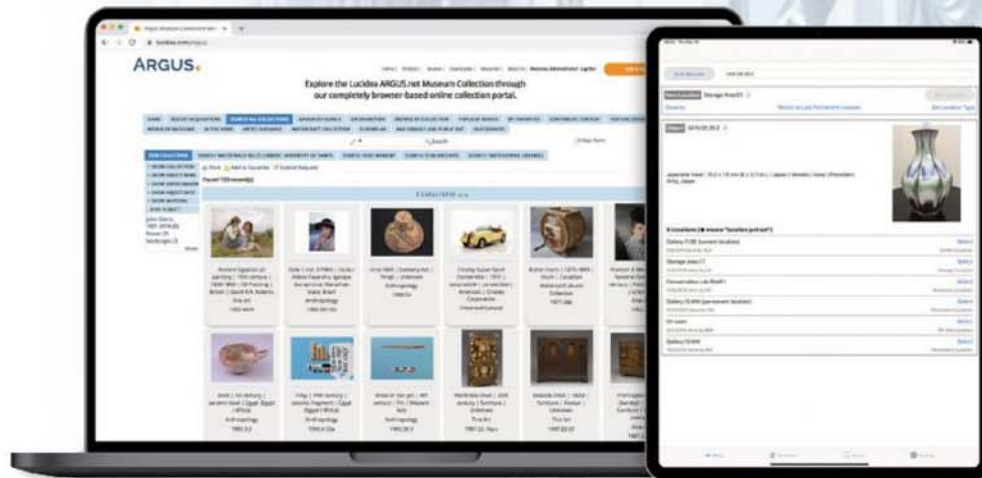
The Science of Clean Air™

Visit DynamicAQS.com or ask us about a free Life Cycle Cost Analysis to find out how much you can save on fan energy and maintenance costs while improving the overall air quality in your building.



ARGUS

Museum Collections Management Software



Engaging • Imaginative • Immersive
Innovative • Essential

Museum professionals like you are reinventing the future of museums. Lucidea's Argus CMS offers comprehensive collections management capabilities, and takes you further—with community curation/co-curation, a dynamic online presence, full multimedia support, and streamlined workflows. It's flexible, extensible, and always up-to-date—solving today's collections management challenges, and ready for tomorrow's. Take charge of your museum's next normal. Argus is here for that. And Lucidea is here for you.

REQUEST A FREE DEMO TODAY!

Call us at [604-278-6717](tel:604-278-6717) or visit us at www.lucidea.com/argus

PANPHONICS

LEADING BRAND IN DIRECTIONAL AUDIO

Imagine being able to direct sound to a specific area with unmatched precision. For instance, Panphonics speakers can focus speech even in noisy environments without increasing the overall ambient noise level. In a museum setting, you can **create a confined audio zone** in front of an art piece where the desired sound is heard. When you step out of the zone, you no longer hear the sound. To further combat the issue of overpowering ambient noise, we have optimized our speakers to play frequencies most sensitive to the human ear.

Founded in 1997 and headquartered in Tampere, Finland, **Panphonics has been delivering directional audio solutions globally for over two decades.** By using the electrostatic principle, we have been able to create speakers with lower coloration, better transient response, lower distortion and higher directivity in comparison to other techniques. The finished product is easy to install, has a light and unobtrusive design, and can withstand extensive use.

Over the years, our technology has been applied in various ways. It has enabled ambitious audio art exhibitions, guided visitors in conference halls, and created **private spaces without walls** in banks and pharmacies via sound masking. In the university world, Panphonics solutions are quickly becoming the standard in the likes of Australian "superlab" designs. As of today, the versatility of our speakers continues to spread the word of directional audio far and wide.

During COVID-19, hygiene has become of paramount importance. With our directional audio solutions, you can **eliminate the need for headphones** that otherwise require near-constant cleaning. It not only saves time, but also decreases unnecessary risk. This, considering the lack of required maintenance, makes our speakers a cost-effective choice as well. What you get when you choose Panphonics is a clear, focused sound field that remains audible even over longer distances. Hands-free.

For more information, visit our website at
www.panphonics.com

You can also contact us directly at
sales@panphonics.com



SAFESPACE

Occupancy Monitoring Solution

Powered by: **SENSOURCE**



- ✓ Automated
- ✓ Real-Time
- ✓ Touchless
- ✓ Multi-Entrance
- ✓ Reporting

Easily abide by new capacity limits within your museum with SenSource's automated occupancy monitoring solution.

We're holding free live web demonstrations every Tuesday and Thursday. Register using code **AAM2020** for a chance to win 3 months of SafeSpace for free! Expires 12/31/20.

sensusourceinc.com/safespace-demo

SENSOURCE

www.sensusourceinc.com

Is the museum brand god dead?

Has the museum brand met its maker? Are brands just a modernist vestige of the 20th Century marketing ethic? Do museums even need to bother anymore?

"Museums are not meant to be experienced in a consistent or predictable fashion. Branding to, as you suggest, standardize the visitor experience is a modernist notion that is unhelpful for today's cultural institutions."

—Lily (commenting on the article "What if museums were run like successful companies?" on Tronvig's website)

Lily suggests that postmodern thought—the tearing down and parsing of the notion that one must appeal to authority to make sense of one's experience—applies to museum brands. Bear with me as I offer some background first on what a brand is, and then take up this question of a paradigm shift that might alter what is required of a museum brand. If you just want the answer first, it's yes, museums do have to bother.

As to the other question about the brand god, you'll have to read on for that.

What is a museum brand?

Indeed, what is a brand anyway?

Short answer: A museum brand—like any brand—is whatever your consumers (visitors and members) have in their minds about you. That's it.

You have a brand whether you choose to exercise any control over it or not.

It's not your colors, your logo, your message, your collection. It's what they—you brand consumers—remember about those things. It's the sum total of the images and ideas that they have about you. It's not necessarily the truth, but it is *their* truth. (You are a brand consumer as well, and the truth you have inside your head is also the brand, but what really matters is the brand as understood by those who pay admissions, attend programs, donate money, and thus allow you to fulfill your organizational and public service mission to educate, enlighten, and inspire.) So, what does the public hold in their minds about you? For good or ill, *that is your brand.*

Branding, therefore, is all the things you do to bring your consumer's truth closer to the truth about you. Your marketing, PR, communications, and visitor services practices all contribute to your brand. All of your consumers have a kind of mental model of you. It may include some or all of those things we traditionally associate with a brand (logos, colors, the masterpieces in your collection, or the cute baby dolphin you use in your advertising), but it also includes the guy who was polite to me when I used the coat check last time I visited. Or the time I came and your institution was closed even though I had gone to your website to check beforehand. Unfortunately, negative emotions can have a more lasting impression than positive ones so you must be very careful with your brand. It is made up of many things, and it is precious.

Branding process

How healthy is your brand? Do you clearly understand who your audiences are and

how well you are meeting their emotional needs? Are you able to think about your exhibitions, programming, and promotional activities from the perspective of your key audiences?

When we work with public institutions like museums, one of the first things that we do is create diagrams that visually represent the mental models their consumers hold. What is the relationship between the real offer and the understanding of that offer in the public's mind? Adjusting, fixing, aligning, and improving this relationship to better reflect reality is what we call *branding.* (This assumes a good product of course.)

So let's assume for a moment that aspects of what you actually deliver day in and day out as an institution are not fully understood by some or all of your audiences.

We are in the habit of relying on this authority to help us understand the world—to see the proper "order of things."

What aspects of your offer have real emotional value for your consumers? What does the consumer *really* care about? This raises the question: Who is your consumer? A detailed answer to this seemingly simple question will clarify exactly which segments of your audience have the strongest and most natural connections to particular parts of your brand. This can also illuminate what other audiences you may be able to attract if only they knew you better. To get these answers you must carefully review your brand from the perspective of each distinct consumer type (persona), and clarify how strong its pull is for each in the context of your competition. Once you know what each audience actually needs from you, then you will have the insight necessary to effectively communicate with them. "Effective" here means you can speak in a language that resonates with them and that specifically addresses *their* emotional needs. Equipped with this knowledge and tooled up as a brand, all of a sudden your marketing efforts become more efficient and effective. The sequence though is critical: Understand, then act. The brand idea comes *before* the logo.

Museum branding and the erosion of authority

For most of human history, we have accepted the top-down authority of certain institutions—whether they be cultural, religious, or, more recently, scientific. We are in the habit of relying on this authority to help us understand the world—to see the proper "order of things." This imposed order assigns meanings, packages it and does it out in discrete, easily digestible forms like museum labels, names for things, or species designations. Thanks to science we understand that a house cat (*felis catus*) is an entirely different category of animal from a dog (*canis lupus familiaris*), even though both may be beloved house pets.

The postmodern movement calls into question this way of chopping up the world. Originating in 19th Century philosophy with Friedrich Nietzsche (who famously pointed out the increasing irrelevance and waning authority of the church with "God is dead") and Søren Kierkegaard, a rebellion has been mounted against such inherited hierarchies. Why, they asked, must one's conception of the world always be handed down from trusted authorities? These thinkers and their philosophical heirs have proposed that an individual has the power to create meaning and to decide what is personally relevant. This suggests that how we give meaning to things—how we distinguish one category from another—might just be arbitrary. Or, it could mean that all systems are equally valid, thus giving each individual the power to create her own world of meaning and parcel it up as she sees fit.

The authority, the curator, the author, the expert—anyone whose charge it is to create grand classifications and assign meaning—has been demoted.

I like this idea, and it is precisely this latter interpretation that I understand Lily to be espousing for museums and, by extension, for museum branding. Who are we, she says, to dictate how one understands the meaning of the content of "my" museum? A museum brand that tries to assign meaning in predictable ways is anathema to this. Follow this reasoning and you get to a very interesting place, one of ever-changing invention and categorization. I'm reminded of the preface to *The Order of Things*, in which Michel Foucault cites a wonderful list of classifications for animals originally invented by Borges in his Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge:

"This passage quotes a certain Chinese encyclopedia in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel-hair brush (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies."

In a postmodern world—the one we live in now—this typology is possible, desirable even. The authority, the curator, the author, the expert—anyone whose charge it is to create grand classifications and assign meaning—has been demoted. This is our Internet paradigm, is it not? The authority is now just one voice among many. In this 21st Century, who is to say that Borges's list, with its amusing classifications, is not just as good as the scientific version we use with its arcane Latin designations?

What does this mean for museum branding?

Has branding been reduced to an unnecessary affectation, an agenda that museums—or any institutions for that matter—no longer need to cultivate?

Nike has now eschewed *Just do it* as too directive and preachy (AdWeek). It is now, they say, left to the consumer to decide how they want to think about Nike's products. Another brand among brands, Apple, is no longer saying anything like *Think different.* It's just putting a small declarative note on its products: *Designed in California.* Is this shift away from brand slogans a sign of the dawn of a new post-branding era, or simply a privilege that can only be enjoyed by the brand elite? More to the point, can your institution forgo the endeavor of museum branding? Let's venture down this path. First, though, let me remind you once again of what a brand is. NOT.

It's just too damn hard to make things from scratch. So we don't.

A brand is not your logo. A brand is not your style guide. A brand is not your slogan, like *Just do it.* A brand is not even your guiding idea. A brand is all the concepts, the memories, the images, the associations, and the feelings that are retained about you or your products in the minds of your consumers. So you have a brand whether you choose to exercise any control over it or not. It is there, inside and outside of your museum, walking through your front entrance (or not, as the case may be) blurry and nondescript, or sharply in focus and shared by many. Your brand lives, breathes, evolves, grows, and fades as you nourish it with whatever you feed it: exhibits, ads, events, news, images, anything and everything that you put out into the world and into people's minds.

So have museums reached a place where brands no longer matter?

Have we reached that place where a person can and should hold any idea about you that she likes, experience your offers just as she chooses, and make of that experience whatever she will? Does such freedom, now or in the

future, mean freedom from curatorial authority, freedom from conceptual frameworks, freedom from the authority of the artist, the learner, the brand manager? Perhaps.

It is an appealing thought. It's a thought that poses a basic question of free will, something that has been debated for centuries and it is also where I get stuck.

Maybe you do need to be more than the sum of the parts of your collections, rather than the object of random thoughts unmolded by concerted and coherent effort.

As much as I would like to imagine it, we are not free. We are not free from our desires and preconceptions. We are not free from our basic needs and our primitive mode of thought. We use patterns and mental shortcuts to make sense of the world. We resort to stories to understand and communicate ideas. These shortcomings make us human and they help us make choices about what we decide to do and what we choose to borrow, we reuse and recycle. It's just too damn hard to make things from scratch. So we don't.

We can't. Our decisions, our ideas, our very thoughts are not ultimately characterized by freedom or originality. Every minute of every day we make use of what is given to us. We think we are rational and independent of outside influence, but in fact we are ever the victim of manipulation and coercion both subtle and profound. We are driven by our emotions and our basic needs. We think we are free only because this notion of ourselves as such massages our egos.

In liberating me, you would, I believe, unfortunately lose me to those who do not share your optimism about the human capacity for invention.

In a postmodern vision of a brand, you would leave me alone. You would not bother with your brand. My decision of what museum to go to, what exhibition to see, what product to buy, would be left entirely up to my free will. And in liberating me, you would, I believe, unfortunately lose me to those who do not share your optimism about the human capacity for invention. You would lose me to those whose more Machiavellian (or at least pragmatic) schemes do employ the tools of marketing manipulation and persuasion, whose use of mechanisms such as branding—that accursed spawn of modern marketing—serve to foil your best-laid postmodern plans for the release of my free will.

You will lose me to a better museum brand and wonder why. Maybe you are supported by the state and do not need to resort to any such measures. Maybe your only competition is your own past best endeavors. Maybe you operate above the fray, outside of the need to attract, or maybe the raw magnetism of your collection is sufficient attraction in its own right.

But maybe it's not. Maybe it's just not enough.

Maybe museums are in the same not-yet-liberated world as everyone else. Maybe your greatness does not come from the fact of your existence, but rather from the fact that your audience is or could be the "everyman." Maybe your craft, your inventions, your products are worth the added effort of figuring out how to impress upon me—your consumer—why I should care. Maybe, just maybe, you are in competition for the same hearts and minds for the same dollars and devotion as everyone else.

Maybe the idea of your museum brand—the answer to the question "Why do you matter to me?"—is not irrelevant at all. Maybe you do need to be more than the sum of the parts of your collections, more than the object of random thoughts unmolded by concerted and coherent effort. Maybe you do need a brand after all—lovely animals drawn with



TOUCHLESS TECHNOLOGIES

and other AV & Interactive Solutions



Touchless Touchscreens
• No touch, gaze controlled interactives



Touchless Buttons and Sensors
• No-touch sensor based activation



Bring Your Own Device
• Smart phone/tablet control



EMERGING FROM CRISIS

One of the largest audience research studies aims to help cultural institutions remain relevant through the pandemic and beyond.

By Arthur Cohen

To provide an expansive, reliable, and in-depth knowledge resource to US cultural institutions as they navigate the unprecedented circumstances stemming from the COVID-19 crisis, cultural and digital strategy and marketing firm LaPlaca Cohen teamed with audience research experts Slover Linett to conduct one of the largest and most ambitious audience research studies ever.

Wave One of *Culture and Community in a Time of Crisis: A Special Edition of Culture Track* was fielded in late April through mid-May of this year. More than 650 cultural organizations of different sizes, in a range of localities and with a variety of audience types, shared their audience lists, resulting in more than 122,000 completed online surveys. These surveys were combined with those from thousands of people from NORC's AmeriSpeak panel to represent the broad demographic diversity of the general US population.

The project was created as a free and open resource and service to the field, funded by a collaborative group of dedicated foundations and philanthropists, led by The Wallace Foundation and the Barr Foundation and supported by Art Bridges and the Terra Foundation for American Art. FocusVision, Microsoft, the Advisory Board for the Arts, and Wilkening Consulting provided additional support and advisory services. In addition, an advisory committee comprised of a diverse group of leading practitioners and experts in the cultural world and the social sciences reviewed and helped refine the study. The result is a robust data set and unique insights into the "hearts and minds" of US cultural audiences and a baseline for a continued research process in Wave Two of the study, which is currently underway.

The following are responses to questions museum leaders had about the survey.

Based on the data, how can museums remain relevant or essential to their communities during the pandemic and post-pandemic?

The audiences we surveyed cited very specific emotional, social, and functional needs from cultural organizations during the pandemic. Foremost among these was the desire to "laugh and relax"—a positive and uplifting alternative to the anxiety and uncertainty pervading their everyday lives. This sentiment

also appears in their desire for organizations to offer "distraction and escape." In addition, the theme of feeling disconnected surfaced in many responses, with audiences looking to cultural institutions to help them "stay connected." Respondents also sought a practical benefit in this period: that cultural organizations "help educate children" while schools are closed.

What prompted audiences to connect with museums and other cultural organizations during the pandemic that they didn't visit pre-pandemic?

This is a particularly interesting finding that we continue to probe. We learned that many respondents accessed online offerings from cultural organizations they did not physically visit in at least the past year. For example, 40 percent of those who accessed cultural content online from art museums had not physically visited such museums in the past 12 or so months. A working hypothesis is that digital might remove the "threshold" from "threshold fear"—that is, digital content overcomes perceptual and other barriers that have kept people from physically crossing the threshold of the museum. This could be because they do not feel invited or included, or they do not see other people like themselves participating. That feeling seemingly dissipates online, where the user chooses the content and determines the terms of engagement. There are also some early indications that audiences accessing cultural content online are more diverse than physical visitors, which suggest some intriguing possibilities for using digital as a channel for future audience development and diversification initiatives.

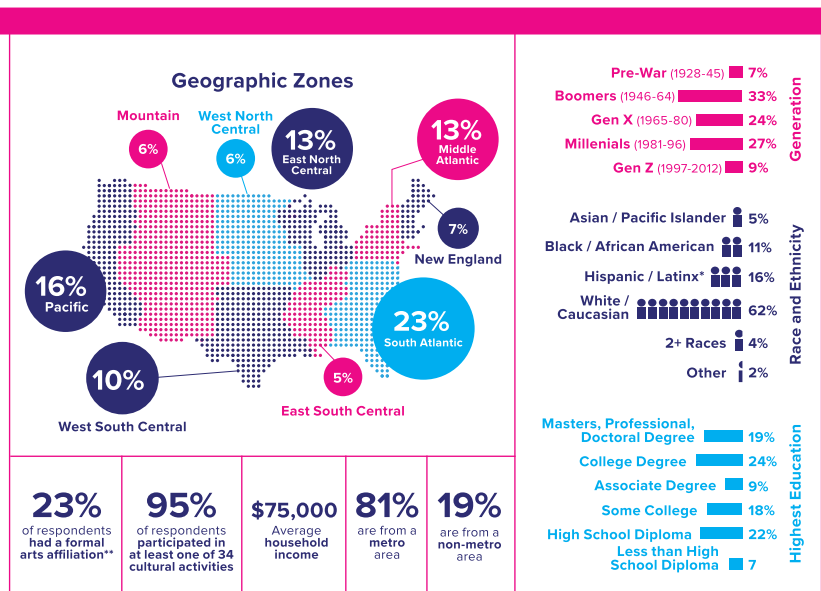
What one audience should cultural organizations focus on in the next six months and why?

This is a layered and complex question to which I can only respond with my subjective opinion, as it's not an issue that research can effectively address. I believe that audiences of color must be prioritized with greater focus and intentionality as we move into a "new normal" period, as these groups have been uniquely and negatively affected by both the health crisis and the ongoing crisis of racial injustice in this country. While this may seem obvious to

A National Portrait

To balance the general population and organization list respondents for analysis and comparison, we statistically weighted the data to reflect actual US demographics. That meant increasing the strength of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx voices among others in the sample.

The numbers on this page and in the rest of the report reflect this combined sample, providing a weighted and representative national picture.



*Includes all with Hispanic ethnicity, regardless of race. All other groups are non-Hispanic.
**Were members, subscribers, volunteers, artists, or employees of cultural organizations.

some, others at this moment are advising to first focus on “core audiences” in order to rebuild. To me, this would seem to risk reactivating the very strategies that have resulted in exclusionary practices and museum audience profiles that do not match the demographics of the communities museums serve.

While our Wave One study was fielded before the horrific killing of George Floyd, we nonetheless were able to confirm adverse social and health-related impacts on these communities. We also quantified a “representation gap” in the lists of audiences and visitors provided by hundreds of cultural organizations that showed how underrepresented audiences of color are on these lists compared to US census data. There is much work to be done here; the moment for the cultural world to address this underrepresentation is clearly upon us.

What potential activity topics or programming examples might be most appealing to audiences based on their expressed needs?

The experiences people seek most from culture vary according to art form. At art museums, for example, people are seeking to be emotionally moved and

transported. They told us they were looking for art museums to provide experiences that are beautiful, challenging or thought-provoking, and emotionally powerful. Science or natural history museum audiences are also seeking experiences that are challenging or thought-provoking, in addition to adventurous, fun and lighthearted, and active and participatory. I’m also struck by the recurring theme of connection and the power of the social, especially coming off of a period of limited social contact. Programming can play a role here, provided it is delivered in a way that is sensitive to concerns about health and hygiene that will be with us for the foreseeable future.

Does the survey data suggest that virtual programming has become an expectation rather than a temporary response to the pandemic? If so, which areas of digital engagement are most likely to have “legs” in the future?

Taken in aggregate, the appeal of cultural content among the audiences we surveyed was profound and, I believe, is unlikely to diminish. This, coupled with what some observers in the tech world have characterized as the “fast-forwarding” of digital



The Wave Two phase of the study is currently underway. To access *Culture and Community in a Time of Crisis: A Special Edition of Culture Track* and related data, visit culturetrack.com.

behavior among all consumers—borne of the necessity of quarantining, school and office closures, and other limitations on shared social activity—suggests that we are moving into a new realm where digital and analog will co-exist as unique but parallel experiences, as opposed to the existing model (at least in the cultural world) where digital has been in service of and usually subordinate to the physical experience. This is classic “disruption” in which previous, long-established standards of behavior are being reinvented—in this case by the audience, whose online preferences and behaviors may well exceed the understanding and expertise of the cultural organizations seeking to connect with them. In our Wave One study, cultural audiences most often cited online activities for kids, online classes or workshops, and livestream performances as the digital content they currently value most.

As only 13 percent of the survey respondents indicated they are paying for digital content, what are some potential revenue-generating strategies for digital?

We must first acknowledge that we are in the early stages of monetization of digital content in the nonprofit cultural world, so that 13 percent figure is probably reflective of a point in time and will evolve as cultural organizations become more adroit in creating digital content that connects with their audiences. That said, we looked at the same figure for a few organizational subsets in our study and found much higher levels—in the 30–40 percent range in some cases—for organizations that can be characterized as “category leaders” with high levels of brand recognition. Perhaps this relates to the way for-profit providers of cultural content have become most successful at monetization: by becoming the “go-to” source for that type of content. A museum seeking to achieve this status

needs to begin by addressing the fundamental issue of who it is online: What is its unique voice and value in a crowded digital landscape that will encourage users to seek it out and, ultimately, pay for its content because they admire it, trust it, and believe they can’t get that same digital experience anywhere else?

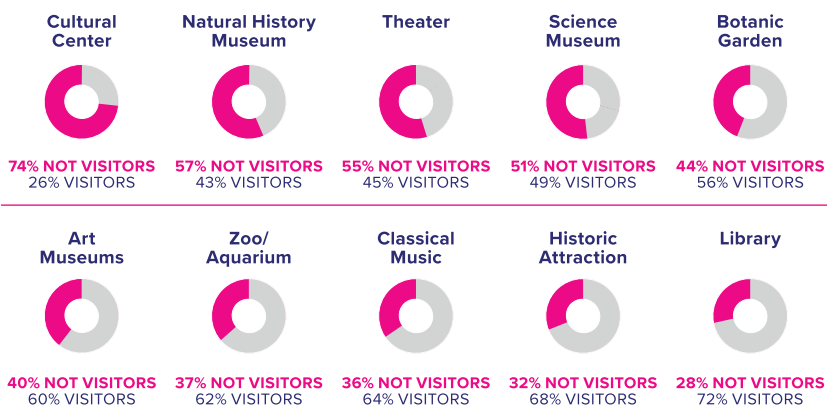
What are some potential messaging and marketing strategies for museums based on this research?

Building on the recurring focus on interpersonal connection and connectedness that emerged in our study, as well as the desire for uplifting and powerful emotional experiences that offer an escape from the worries and anxieties of the moment, I could envision reopening marketing strategies that emphasize the positive, social, and experiential qualities of returning to physical cultural spaces. There is a real opportunity to demonstrate empathy; audiences are likely to value knowing that their museums are “here for you”: ready to welcome them, easy to enjoy, and there to provide opportunities to reconnect and relax. Of course different people will want different versions of reconnection (e.g., some will seek solitary encounters with favorite works in collections, while others will find comfort in shared moments of experience). Yet perhaps now more than ever, the social and emotional are likely to be among the most compelling messaging themes.

A Virtual Gateway

Many respondents who are using online cultural offerings had not physically visited the same kinds of cultural organizations in the past year.

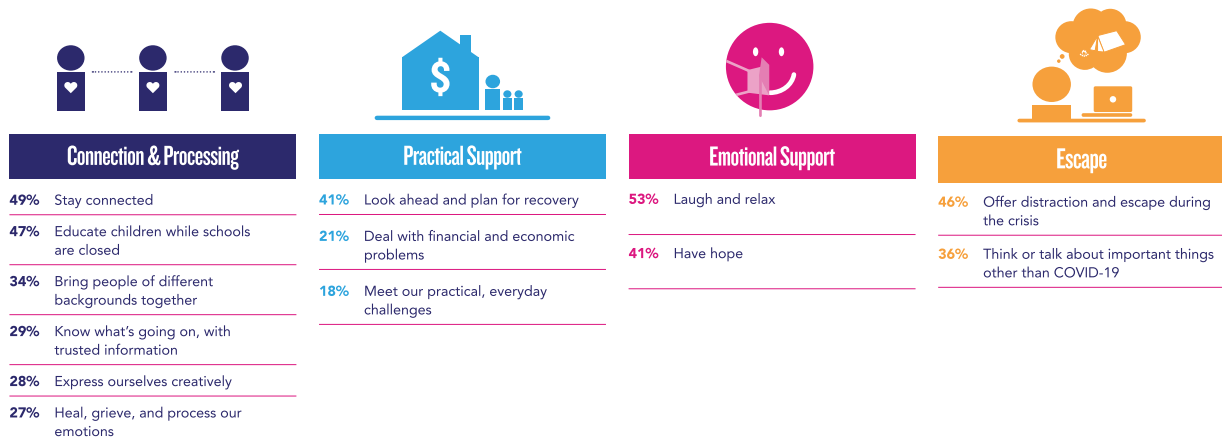
Breakdown of Digital Users by Content Category and Prior Visitation



Categories are listed in descending order of non-visitors in the past year.

A Meaningful Role to Play

Response patterns revealed four core community needs.



Response patterns were grouped into themes using factor analysis. Total exceeds 100% as respondents could check any that apply.

Audiences also had some specific “wish list” desires about how they would like cultural organizations to change and evolve—and almost all of them (96 percent) expressed an interest in seeing some sort of change. Among the opportunities for evolution in message, content, and experience are: increased focus on inclusivity and community—such as “being friendlier to all kinds of people,” being “more fun” and “less formal,” increasing “support for local artists,” and being more relevant and relatable by “sharing stories or content that connect to my life.”

What new museum leadership models do the data support?

First, let’s acknowledge that the impact of the current health crisis is unprecedented in its immediacy, and it is being viscerally experienced by all. For example, we found that almost one in eight of the people we surveyed has been directly physically impacted by the COVID-19 crisis (i.e., they, a family member, or a close friend had been ill due to COVID-19). Further, four in ten reported a reduction in income directly attributable to the crisis. The numbers were even more dire for communities of color. Add to this the ongoing uncertainty about recovery and its related anxieties, and this provides a snapshot of how deeply the audience is hurting. So I would say the first leadership model for this moment is one based on empathy; how can the museum be a place to help, to understand, and to just make people feel better?

Second, like all good research, I hope these findings ultimately support the essential and intuitive notion that the opportunities for growth and evolution—not just in leadership, but fundamentally in redefining and reactivating the museum’s essential purpose in society—occur when we look at ourselves through the eyes of our audiences. To do this, we must recognize that the convergence of a health crisis and a social justice crisis is a lived experience that must be reckoned with on an ongoing basis. As the wise and insightful social impacts advisor and nonprofit consulting colleague Lisa Yancey notes, “It’s not a moment. It’s a movement.”

For a museum leader, then, this means a constant focus on outside-in assessment, enhancing organizational expertise by infusing it with the concerns, needs, hopes, and dreams of those the museum serves. In the past, the idea of “collaborative leadership” has focused on collaboration between director and staff, and perhaps with the board. Now and in the future, I believe, “collaboration” will be defined in a more porous and expansive way that engages many voices in a truly equitable manner and creates new models of cultural exchange and experience where people can find not just beauty and inspiration, but also meaning and relevance.

Arthur Cohen is founder and CEO at LaPlaca Cohen, a cultural and digital strategy and marketing firm based in New York City.



MAY 9-12 · CHICAGO
MAY 24 + JUNE 7-9 · VIRTUAL

Resilient, Together

**ANNUAL MEETING &
MUSEUMEXPO**

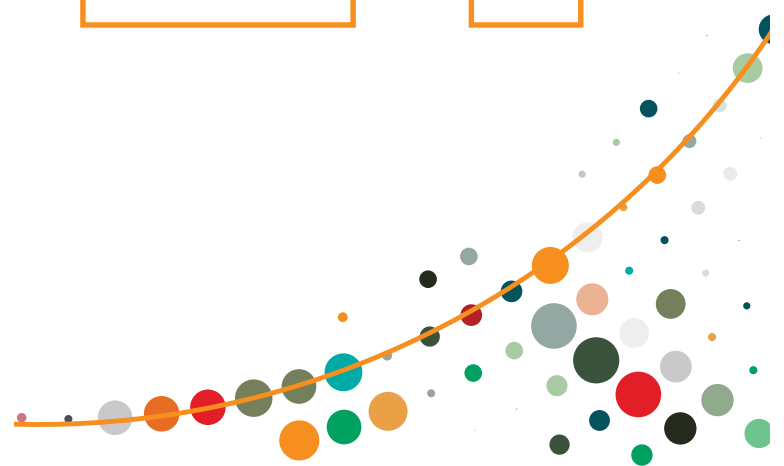
2021



**American
Alliance of
Museums**

Registration Opens Soon!

Join thousands of museum professionals from around the world at the 2021 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo. Stay up-to-date on new developments by visiting our website annualmeeting.aam-us.org or following the hashtag **#AAM2021** on social media.





THE DIGITAL AWAKENING

Global disruption has demonstrated the need for a digital-first approach to online engagement.

By Nik Honeysett

Those of us who have spent our careers working in the museum digital space have often had to make the case for why digital engagement is important and argue for budget and resources to support it. Over the past few months, however, the forced closures due to COVID-19 have succinctly made that case for us. But now is not the time to say “I told you so,” although, I confess, I have said it.

Now is the time to steer museums away from simply trawling their file servers and hard drives for existing content to publish online. Now is the time to create robust and thoughtful strategies that seek to create digital-first, compelling, and imaginative experiences that draw audiences into ever-increasing interactions with our collections and programming—and drive attendance as we reopen.

Museum business models must quickly evolve to address this disruption and other existential threats, and digital engagement strategies must evolve even faster to create the online exposure and opportunities that are now necessary. Whether or not we return to normal operations, we cannot return to normal digital operations.

We are not done with the virus, and it is not done with us. For those of us dependent on visitors who travel to us from afar, we will have to focus on our local markets and, more importantly, our communities, where attracting new audiences and increasing repeat visits will be crucial. Whether we pursue earned and contributed revenue streams directly from digital or seek to create compelling digital experiences, our most critical strategy is to significantly increase and diversify our online audiences. In other words, we need to scale.

Research suggests that it takes about 90 days to form a habit, so we can assume that the general public has formed a digital habit during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our challenge now is to prioritize the creation of compelling digital content without making it an unsustainable burden. In part, this requires museums to better balance digital and analog work, or rather, to do more digital work at the expense of less analog work. A digital-first approach is needed.

Understanding the Online Experience

As we consider what “digital first” means, it is worth

acknowledging that creating more digital content will pit us against the rest of the increasingly online museum world and the streaming subscription services that dominate our entertainment consumption. Therefore, we should understand what has made streaming services so successful in the battle for attention.

The model puts control of compelling content and complex narratives into the hands of its users and promotes social and sharing experiences. For example, if I am midway through a series on Netflix, a friend can binge watch to catch up, and we can experience the rest of the series together with Netflix Party. Four compelling social traits are at play here, which should inform a museum’s digital storytelling narratives: the user is in control, the experiences are episodic, replay is possible, and users can share experiences.

As we transition to compelling digital experiences, the personas defined by John Falk that inform physical museum visits are replaced by streamer habits defined by, in this case, Hulu:

- Therapeutic streamers: want a way to decompress
- Classic streamers: shared viewing is a part of a daily routine
- Indulgent streamers: binge watchers
- Curated streamers: selectively watch to create or drive cultural conversation

A digital-first approach for museums prioritizes the online experience in the planning and delivery of programming and exhibitions, as opposed to creating online experiences that merely promote exhibitions. The return on investment of a digital-first approach is clear: while the exhibition might last three or six months, the online expression will remain long after the exhibition has disappeared, potentially for decades.

The Royal Academy’s (RA) online life-drawing class offers a great example of a digital-first approach. In 2018, the RA decided to flip the model of an in-person studio class to create a compelling and evolving online experience. The result was a live-streamed life-drawing class that occurred in tandem with social media participation. While there were a small number of artists in the studio during the actual event, a global audience also tuned in to take the class and share their drawings

on Twitter and Instagram using the #LifeDrawingLive hashtag. More than 50,000 people virtually attended the class, and now, critically, two years later anyone can take the class by watching the recording and sharing their work. A single moment of physical activity and investment has created an evolving and growing online experience and a community that self-perpetuates.

Time is a critical component in successfully connecting with audiences. Museums should seek to create episodic digital experiences that coincide with timed physical experiences that create a sense of urgency and encourage repeat visits. A key strategy: an evolving digital narrative that can be replayed and presents key events or periodic “reveal” moments that are tied to physical artifacts only on view on specific dates. This approach provides episodic experiences; creates demand for a physical visit; allows replay to catch up; and, through social media alerts, can be delivered literally into the hands of the museum audiences via their mobile devices. The digital and physical component can be experienced separately, but the combination is much more powerful, and the digital content can be reused for the physical display.

Created in 2018, one of the most compelling episodic digital experiences is the *Last Seen* podcast series. A collaboration between WBUR and *The Boston Globe*, the series covers the 30-year-old Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum theft, known as the largest unsolved art heist in history. This successful series expertly makes the case for professional storytelling and compelling episodic narrative. Ironically, the podcast created demand for a museum visit to see empty frames.

An image from the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s video *Morning MeditOcean—A Guided Meditation with the Moon Jellies*, available on its website.



A more recent example is the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s meditation videos, *Morning MeditOcean*, which have garnered millions of views as an antidote to the tension and anxiety we’re all currently experiencing. The approximately 15-minute videos guide users through a mindful meditation while offering calming aquatic scenes.

Achieving Digital Success

The rush to put digital content online in response to pandemic-related closures highlighted many museums’ lack of robust digital content production strategy. Decreased traffic clearly identified websites with nothing more than visit-related content.

Success with digital content requires the same investment of time and effort as for any physical experience or offering. Scaling digital audiences is a key strategy (see “Revenue from Digital” sidebar at right). This strategy, however, is no different from any growth initiative, such as a membership drive or a capital campaign. The scale of success is directly related to the investment of time and money.

Unfortunately, because the very nature of social media is somewhat opportunistic, leadership often misunderstands and then underinvests in it. This can manifest in poor staffing strategies that assume it can be accomplished as part of another role or that young employees are inherently good at social media.

Leveraging trending hashtags or memes and contextualizing them within the museum’s mission, as well as creating periodic narratives or moments on relevant specific topics, are strategies that incrementally boost followers. For example, residents of the UK’s Sydmar Lodge Care Home recreated classic album covers during the COVID-19 lockdown at the suggestion of the home’s activities manager, who was looking to keep spirits up. The care home boosted its meager social media presence with hundreds of thousands of likes and tens of thousands of retweets and comments—numbers most museums covet. Growing digital audiences is not simply happenstance, it requires professionals with the appropriate creativity, skills, and expertise.

Pursuing digital engagement strategies, whether on social media, third-party platforms, or a museum’s website, requires an ongoing attention to cultural

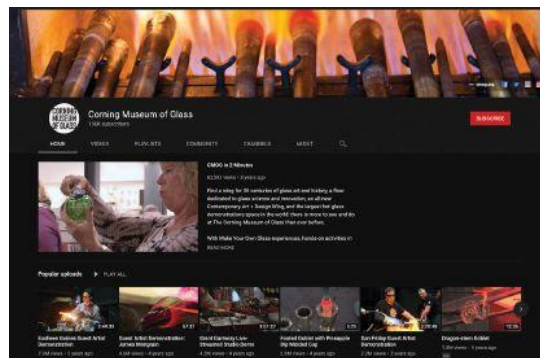
trends. This is the cost of doing business. Many museums have begun experimenting with emerging channels such as TikTok (the leading destination for short-form mobile video), which attracts a much younger demographic. The Carnegie Museum of Natural History (@carnegiemnh) has amassed 250,000 followers in a little over six months with 3 million likes thanks in large part to its joke-telling mollusks curator Tim Pierce. The museum's success has resulted in a partnership with TikTok to create educational videos.

Other platforms that museums are beginning to experiment with include Animal Crossing, a simulation video game for children that supports a high level of customization. Museums, including the Cincinnati Art Museum, have made it simple to use their digitized collection images to customize a player's virtual home or island. Both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Getty Museum have made their entire collections of Open Access images available for use. An Open Access initiative is crucial for digital engagement, in this case introducing high-quality works of art to children.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced museums to focus on digital engagement. Clearly, museums have demonstrated the ability to "pivot to digital" and are capable of innovation and creativity. But this pivot has also exposed the lack of systematic attention to generating meaningful, interpretive, rich media experiences as opposed to digital surrogates for objects in the collection.

We are witnessing a digital awakening for many organizations, including museums, which must now recognize that investment and prioritization of digital content is a mission-driven requirement.

Nik Honeysett is chief executive officer of the Balboa Park Online Collaborative (BPOC), a San Diego-based nonprofit technology consultancy connecting audiences to art, culture, and science. The details in this article are based on BPOC's museum strategy work with insight from Alexandra Kron, Jack Ludden, and Neal Stimler. Many thanks also to Scott Sayre at The Corning Museum of Glass and Dana Allen-Greil at the Monterey Bay Aquarium.



REVENUE FROM DIGITAL

A key purpose of building digital audiences is "conversion," which can be conversion to direct or indirect revenue or conversion to an online or physical activity. Conversion is the transition from browsing to action; the top 500 online retailers have an average buyer conversion rate of a little over 3 percent. So you need a large initial pool to ensure a significant number of converts.

The Corning Museum of Glass provides a great example of why scale and conversion are important. Corning has had a YouTube channel since 2007 and currently has a regular program of high-quality, extended videos of artist demonstrations and glassblowing skills. In 2019, the museum considered monetizing its channel, which had approximately 125,000 subscribers. After discussions with leadership and the board about subscribers' perception of paid advertisements appearing during its videos, the museum decided to pilot monetization of its YouTube channel.

The museum received negligible negative response and is now permanently committed to a monetized YouTube channel. Its subscriber base grew by approximately 20 percent during the first six months of 2020, and it expects six-figure revenue for calendar 2020 from a combination of ad revenue and paid subscribers. To date, the channel has over 1,100 videos, more than 52 million lifetime views, and an average view duration of 1.2 hours.

However, this is not a free puppy; it requires 1.5 full-time staff members dedicated to video production and YouTube management. One has to invest money to make money.

Building Audience with Intentionality

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is reimagining how it serves its African American community. By Jamie O. Bosket



Streamers fly on June 22, 2019, on the front steps of the Virginia Museum of History & Culture as thousands watch local officials unveil new Arthur Ashe Boulevard street signs.

“My parents told me this wasn’t a place for people like me. . . .”

This wasn’t the first time I had heard some variation of this, but it carried particular weight on this day. After a hug and a smile, the kind woman who said it to me walked up the historic front steps of the museum and through the front door.

On June 22, 2019, the Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC) welcomed the largest and most diverse audience for a museum event in its long history. Thousands of people from Richmond, across the Commonwealth of Virginia, and well beyond crowded onto the museum’s front lawn for the dedication of Arthur Ashe Boulevard—a new name for the prominent Richmond avenue that features the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the VMHC, among other nearby attractions.

Stepping out of our comfort zone, we had joined the Ashe family and other local voices in advocating (a first for us) for this important name change. This roadway intersects Monument Avenue, where a statue of Stonewall Jackson once stood, and ends at the city-owned tennis courts where, in a segregated Richmond, Ashe was originally denied access. Symbols and names matter.

On this hot June day, the museum hosted a celebration featuring members of the Ashe family, civil rights icon Congressman John Lewis, and

other members of the Congressional Black Caucus, including its chair, Congresswoman Karen Bass. Virginia politicians, including Senator Tim Kaine, Congressmen Don McEachin and Bobby Scott, and Governor Ralph Northam participated as well. They gathered not only to commemorate the life and legacy of humanitarian and tennis champion Arthur Ashe Jr., a Virginia native, but also to mark the 400th anniversary of the arrival of enslaved Africans in English North America at Point Comfort, Virginia—the topic of a commemorative exhibition at the museum that began its run that afternoon.

Undoubtedly, there was a third theme in the air that day as well: the oldest cultural organization in Virginia was making its belated debut to a new audience, the city’s Black residents, about half of Richmond’s population. This was a historic moment, a long time in the making and the culmination of many timely and strategic steps.

“There are many who avoided this building right here behind me,” said David Harris, Jr., Arthur Ashe’s nephew, at the event. “Today I want you to consider

All photos courtesy of the Virginia Museum of History & Culture



Listen to the article in audio format
bit.ly/buildingaudiences

this building is now fully integrated. . . . We are going to partner with you and bring you . . . different faces, peoples, ideals, and thoughts to this building to be a beacon to the world.”

A Long History

Founded in 1831, the Virginia Historical Society—the historic name of the VMHC—is one of the oldest such organizations in the nation. Chief Justice John Marshall was its first president and President James Madison its first member. In nearly 190 years of operation, the museum has amassed more than nine million items in its collection, now housed at the museum’s approximately 250,000-square-foot

headquarters in the state’s capital.

The historical society, like so many across the nation and particularly in the South, not only preserves history, but has its own extensive and often complicated institutional story. At its founding just 55 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the society was built with the future in mind but led by and focusing on the few. Nonetheless, it formed a founding-era collection featuring many national treasures.

The VMHC’s campus speaks to another element of its complicated past. After years of moving from one temporary home to the next and dodging the destruction of the Civil War, the historical society

acquired a grand edifice in what was then the outskirts of Richmond for its permanent home. Built in 1912 by the Confederate Memorial Association (CMA) on land previously used as a veterans camp for aging Confederate soldiers, the structure was meant to rival Grant’s Tomb in New York. In many ways, it was a home to perpetuate the Lost Cause by glorifying the Confederacy and rewriting the narrative of the Civil War and its aftermath.

Not long after the building’s completion, however, the CMA was faltering. The historical society seized the opportunity and subsumed the CMA and its collections. While we gained a new and sizeable home, we have also, in some measure, carried their “baggage” ever since. The “Battle Abbey,” as it was called for decades, has largely blended into the much larger mass of the museum complex—it is a small fraction of the current facility. Its Confederate portraits, busts, and flags are no longer on display, but its history remains.



Congressman John Lewis inspires attendees as the keynote speaker of the VMHC’s Arthur Ashe Boulevard dedication and the “Determined: The 400-Year Struggle for Black Equality” exhibition opening.

“Virginia deserves a history museum that welcomes and represents all. This is more obvious and important at this time and in this place than perhaps ever before.”

Over the past several decades, museum leadership inspired and implemented significant advances in the organization’s priorities and programming—guiding it to be far more public-facing than ever before. Good work and good intentions brought many impressive exhibitions and worthy projects to tell more diverse stories, like “Unknown No Longer,” a massive, ongoing research effort to scour through hundreds of thousands of archival materials to reveal the names and stories of enslaved Virginians previously neglected from public record.

However, our future requires us to do more—to accelerate the pace of progress and to take full advantage of past accomplishments for even greater transformation. Virginia deserves a history museum that welcomes and represents all. This is more obvious and important at this time and in this place than perhaps ever before.

A Work in Progress

When I arrived in 2017, despite the efforts of many talented and dedicated people, museum attendance was inconsistent and shrinking overall. Even with a robust donor base, the museum’s finances were strained by unsustainable endowment draws, and debt was an albatross. We still had a persistent public perception problem directly connected to our institutional history.

We needed to reimagine and reintroduce ourselves. We began listening—to people who knew us, people who thought they knew us, and people who didn’t—and planning with care. What we did next needed to be informed, sincere, and persistent.

Our planning effort, which lasted the better part of a year, resulted in change that was more far-reaching than we anticipated. Our new strategy, focused on inclusivity and relevance, articulated the



type of place we aspire to be and that our greater community desires. Key themes of engagement and convening required us to rebuild and restructure. Over about two years, some two-thirds of our staff changed; all but one member of our leadership team was new.

It also became clear during this process of evolution that even our name was incongruous with our path. Beyond the simple sense of exclusivity brought by the term “society,” we needed an obvious indication that times were changing. We announced our new name in 2018, which along with a largely new team and purposeful new programs, formed a fresh brand and a pivot point.

Well-known local mural artist and community activist Hamilton Glass paints an original work at the VMHC as part of its recent “Mending Walls” display.



Highlights video of the Arthur Ashe Boulevard dedication ceremony
virginiahistory.org/Asheblvd



In commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in British North America, the VMHC mounted "Determined: The 400-Year Struggle for Black Equality" to examine the history of Black Americans as they fought for freedom, equal justice, and access to opportunities.

Long-term success, in part, will come from a programmatic portfolio and a team that reflects our community in nearly every way possible. There are currently too few people of color on our staff and board, but we are making progress on both fronts. We hope, for example, that a partnership with nearby Virginia Union University, a historically Black university, will provide a local pipeline for students interested in museum and library work.

The president of Virginia State University, another historically Black university, now sits on our Board of Trustees and nominating committee. We have also changed the way we recruit staff by increasing our spending with media outlets with substantial Black readership/listenership.

Partnerships have also been an essential part of our growth by informing our progress, building trust and awareness, and improving our programming.

“Now we must keep our momentum alive and thoughtfully seize upon the cautious optimism of our new and growing Black audience.”



With a goal of mutuality, we've begun collaborating with, hosting, and even directing funds to, and in other ways supporting, community groups, including those focused on racial justice and Black history and culture.

Until recently, we've had little or no formal collaboration with the nearby Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia. Now, we have a long-term partnership agreement to share and care for their collections. We are dedicating VMHC staff support over several years to catalog, rehouse, digitize, and securely store the bulk of the Black History Museum collection—a longstanding goal of theirs. They will always maintain ownership, but we will have shared use of their collections (and they of ours) and will jointly share the digital assets created. This may be the very definition of mutuality, a win-win for both organizations.

This year we added a new management position within the president's office to seek and nurture partnerships and community engagement. We will also begin a new program that allows

our staff to dedicate a portion of their paid work time each month to support other nonprofits. We hope this ambassador program will continue to spread awareness of our aspirations, humanize us, and inspire new and lasting connections. And, while it may sound unrelated, we worked with the Richmond City Council to become a new polling place—another way to open our doors to all community members.

Building relationships, trust, and awareness is but one part of our work. Our programming and collections, of course, must be compelling and relevant too. Proactively seeking collections related to underrepresented Virginians is essential, so we recently created a new curatorial role devoted entirely to this endeavor.

The major exhibition we opened on June 22, 2019, "Determined: The 400-Year Struggle for Black

Equality," resulted in the highest and most diverse museum attendance in our history—an overall annual attendance increase of some 50 percent over our historical average. Through the advisory group of statewide scholars and community leaders from diverse racial backgrounds that oversaw its planning and design, we also gained many new and helpful friends.

This past summer, "Mending Walls," a pop-up display of local mural artists reflecting on the history being made right now, was inspired by the graffiti on boarded windows and building walls amid protests and unrest in Richmond. It is an example of our willingness to be nimble (we planned and implemented this in about a week), listen to what is happening around us, and share authority. Young and diverse artists found a blank canvas on our gallery walls for both their art and their own interpretation.


What's Next

None of the work we have done, and are doing, is particularly groundbreaking, but, as a whole, and applied consistently and with sincerity, it has set us on an exciting path that many in our community and across our state would not have expected. It is a path of greater mission fulfillment and public service. It has also led to new financial stability, via growth in visitation and membership, and a new sense of hopefulness and vibrancy.

Now we must keep our momentum alive and thoughtfully seize upon the cautious optimism of our new and growing Black audience. To that end, we are taking what we've learned in the past three years to inform a \$30 million programmatic expansion and renovation of the museum that will open up our building—literally in some cases—and provide more space for public programming and community convening.

This is not a success story. This is a work in progress—and may always be. But it is work worth doing.

Jamie O. Bosket is president and CEO of the Virginia Museum of History & Culture in Richmond.



By Josh Barr

SETTING A HIGHER BAR

Since its inception, the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum has focused on universal accessibility.

Well before the first shovel went in the ground, even before pen went to paper to start designing the museum dedicated to American elite athletes and their participation in the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, the decision was made. The United States Olympic & Paralympic Museum would be one of the most accessible and inclusive museums in the world.

“From conception, we wanted something that would really set a national and global standard in accessibility,” says Dick Celeste, founding chairman of the museum’s board of directors.

A centerpiece for the revitalization of the southwest part of downtown Colorado Springs, Colorado, the museum initially was called the U.S. Olympic Museum & Hall of Fame. But



The Introduction to the Games gallery at the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum explores the history of the ancient games and the origins of the modern Olympic and Paralympic movements.

with a focus on accessibility from the start, the museum was well positioned when the U.S. Olympic Committee changed its name to the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee in June 2019. One month later, the museum announced the addition of Paralympic to its name.

“The minute it was on the table that the museum was going to include Olympians

and Paralympians, it focused everybody,” says Kathy Barrie of Barrie Projects, which performed the museum’s feasibility study and then worked on all aspects of the museum’s development. “If you’re going to do a museum including Paralympians, they have to have the same accessibility as everyone else.”

Bill Baum, U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum





From storytelling to feedback on the interactive sports, Team USA athletes were consulted throughout the project to ensure an authentic guest experience.

Universal Design

While the museum’s decision to give Olympians and Paralympians equal standing required little debate, the considerations for how to accommodate all guests ran the gamut.

For persons with a physical disability, the museum needed to be completely accessible. Everything was designed structurally for two people in wheelchairs to be able to maneuver next to each other throughout the museum.

For guests with visual or hearing impairments, their journey through the museum’s narrative arc and the content delivery, from authentic artifact displays to digital interactives, needed to be similar to that of all guests.

The museum hired a series of consultants to ensure a parallel experience for everyone who visits. They researched other museums committed to accessibility; several project members visited the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg to see how that museum addressed the issues at hand and the language it used throughout.

And one consultant added a unique perspective to the design process: Ileana Rodriguez, a swimmer with a visual impairment who competed in the London 2012 Paralympic Games and founded her own consultancy, I Design Access. She was impressed with the entire team’s dedication to accessibility and universal design.

“It was not just a check of the box,” Rodriguez says. “The architects did a fantastic job to make this possible. Certainly there was a commitment from both ends: from the client, obviously, but also from the architects themselves. They wanted to make it happen.”

From the outside, the museum has sweeping, angular sides that resemble an athlete in motion. The building’s 60,000-square-foot interior is ramped in its entirety, allowing guests to traverse all three levels without leaving any gallery space. Everyone begins their visit with the same elevator ride to the top of the museum and then descends via the ramped inner perimeter of the building.

“It’s a universal pathway—a singular route that enables a shared, common experience,” says Ben

OPENING IN A PANDEMIC

Getting ready to open in the midst of a global health crisis, the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum took extraordinary measures, working with state and local officials to ensure guests could confidently and safely visit the new museum in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

“From an epidemiological standpoint, you wish you had these tools for every situation to keep people safe,” says Leon Kelly, El Paso County coroner and chief medical examiner. “A lot of what we’re doing is in the dark ages compared to what the museum is doing.”

Among the measures taken:

- Capacity is reduced to ensure that guests can socially distance within the museum.
- Face coverings are mandated in the museum.
- Every guest and staff member has their temperature taken before entry.
- Ticketing and primary access control was moved to the outdoor plaza in front of the museum.
- Every guest receives a keepsake stylus to use on interactive screens and other touchable elements throughout the museum, significantly limiting surface contacts.
- A staff-led orientation helps all guests understand museum safety features, social distancing measures, and the guest safety and cleaning tools available throughout the museum.
- Guest sanitation and safety stations with hand sanitizer and alcohol wipes were installed throughout the museum.
- Visual social distancing indicators were installed for queueing and exhibit viewing.
- Physical social distancing dividers were installed in various exhibits and interactive experiences.
- The museum, Flame Café, and The Museum Shop are all cash-free and contactless-card enabled. The Museum Shop also has a digital mirror that allows guests to virtually try on an item.
- The museum’s airflow dynamics were altered so that exhaust fans in restrooms run 24 hours a day to move out any contaminants. Additionally, the HVAC system does not use recycled air anywhere in the building.
- The RFID chip in each guest’s credential provides a monitoring system that can be used if contact tracing is needed.



The U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum is a one-of-a-kind tribute to the Olympic and Paralympic movements, with Team USA athletes at the center of the story.



Gilmartin, a partner at the museum’s design architect, Diller Scofidio + Renfro.

Throughout the spiraling, downward ramp, guests enter a series of 12 exhibition galleries, focusing on topics such as the winter games, the summer games, athlete training, and the lab—an exhibition focusing on the evolution of science, technology, and equipment in sports—as well as collections of torches and medals. Each gallery uses a variety of tools and features (described below) to ensure that every guest has a similar experience.

Technology Tools

Before beginning their journey, guests use their smartphone or one of several kiosks to register and customize their experience. They can choose their favorite sports, which can personalize some of the screened media that plays throughout the museum, and they can make a series of accessibility choices, including:

- preferred text size
- preferred screen contrast
- enabling audio descriptions for each gallery (roughly six minutes long)
- enabling audio-described video

Guests then receive a credential—similar to one an athlete participating in an Olympic or Paralympic Games receives—with an RFID chip in it that triggers the accessibility features they enabled as they enter each gallery. For example, a tactile floor strip near the entry of each gallery triggers audio descriptions that play over a speaker for visitors who selected that function. Additionally, for screened media with different options, the RFID chip will trigger the clip that corresponds to the guest’s selected preferences. The RFID chip also connects guests to their own personal digital locker, which stores links that will allow them to revisit items of interest from the visit. The RFID implementation was a key collaboration between the museum team and exhibit designer Gallagher & Associates.

Olympians and Paralympians, such as speed skater Eric Heiden, basketball player Rebecca Lobo, and swimmer Brad Snyder, recorded the audio descriptions of the galleries and videos. Thus, guests hear from voices familiar with the topic and perhaps familiar to the listener.

Other accessibility enhancements include tactile keypads to assist with screen navigation as well as captions and American Sign Language that play across all video and interactive content.

“A typical approach would be to produce films and then think about accessibility services,” says Hayley Walsh, projects and company director of Centre Screen, which produced the museum’s interactives and screened media. “But even simple things such as captions and American Sign Language were designed into the films instead of being added as an overlay.”

Other Inclusive Features

There are benches with cane rests located throughout the museum. Also, much of the display signage is placed at a comfortable height and angle for wheelchair users to read, and the lighting and sound were adapted to better serve all guests. Smooth flooring, not carpet, was chosen to ensure ease of movement for wheelchairs. Glass handrails are used in the atrium to provide low-height visibility.

The seating area in the Flame Café was expanded from the initial plans, and the furniture selected can accommodate groups of guests using wheelchairs to optimize the shared experience. Assistive listening devices; non-motorized transport chairs; weighted lap pads to help with focus and calming through sensory integration; and sensory inclusive bags that include fidget tools, noise-canceling headphones, and more are available for complimentary guest use. Those items often are reserved in advance; the museum stresses this availability in its communications with guests who purchase tickets in advance online.

For the sport interactive exhibits that are accessible to all users, a mix of Olympic and Paralympic disciplines showcase the speed, balance, accuracy, and reaction time that all elite athletes demonstrate. For the archery interactive, the bows are hung so that a person in a wheelchair can use them. A few steps later, an interactive exhibit allows every guest to take their shot at goalball, the most popular team sport for blind and visually impaired athletes, where teams try to roll a ball that contains bells past the opposing team’s goal line.

The Parade of Nations, a 360-degree exhibit, is among the displays that feature a low-sensory version for guests needing an alternative experience with a reduced sensory load. The exhibit ramp in the Winter Games gallery and the 40-foot LED wall in

the museum’s atrium also have low-sensory options, which are triggered by museum team members stationed in these areas.

When it came time for exhibit fabricator Creo Industrial Arts to test its interactives, Paralympic athletes—including those with hearing impairments, vision impairments, and amputees—were brought in to provide their feedback, such as the need to make the ski poles adjustable on the skiing interactive.


“That feedback was taken to heart,” says Jan Majewski, director of inclusive cultural and educational projects at the Institute for Human Centered Design and one of the advisers on the project. “They were going to the source and saying we need you to be the storyteller here.

“It wasn’t a matter of just, ‘We will adapt what we are creating for Olympians to be used by Paralympians or people with disabilities.’ From the beginning they started looking at how can we design this universally so everybody can use it? How can we design the content so people learn what goalball is?”

While the museum’s opening was delayed because of COVID-19, a series of safety protocols (see “Opening in a Pandemic” sidebar on p. 45) were developed in conjunction with local and state officials, and the museum opened July 30—just days after the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

“ADA was a starting point,” says Christopher Liedel, the museum’s chief executive officer. “The goal was to go well beyond and set a new standard.

“It was central to level the playing field in terms of the recognition of these athletes, that Paralympians are held in the same regard as the Olympians. Whether you do not have a disability or you are a person of disability, it is important that we celebrate the human achievement of all athletes.”

 **Josh Barr** oversees digital museum content for the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

By Rachel Ginsberg and Carolyn Royston

How Might We Transform?

The Interaction Lab at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum seeks to re-envision visitor experience.

The idea behind the Interaction Lab (the Lab) at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum is simple: museums can build audiences by proposing new ways of interacting with them. The Lab is a new kind of research and development program designed to challenge assumptions and expand thinking about visitor experience and introduce new ways for audiences to engage with the museum across physical, digital, and human interactions.

If you've already heard of the Interaction Lab, it's most likely because of our public programming, launched in September 2019 with a discussion about museums and artificial intelligence (AI) in collaboration with UK-US research group Museums + AI Network. Over the following six months, we held four more sold-out public programs, for audiences of 100 people, that introduced provocations and ideas based on needs uncovered in our cross-departmental work at Cooper Hewitt and observations from the museum sector. Topics included the relationship between interpretation, design practice, and storytelling; using bodystorming to explore accessibility; connecting information design to sensemaking; and a prototyping

All photos by Nikola Bradonjic



Workshop leaders Zazel-Chavah O'Garra and Anna Gichan question the sovereignty of certain bodies in certain spaces for the Interaction Lab's Bodystorming Access workshop in December 2019.



MOVING THROUGH A MUSEUM IN A PANDEMIC

In early Interaction Lab brainstorming, we heard frequent requests for a “choose your own adventure” museum experience. Diving deeper, we quickly understood that “adventure” really meant a designed experience that follows an arc across beginning, middle, and end. So we commissioned designers to explore how storytelling could guide visitors through the museum.

Then COVID-19 hit. Safety-driven design constraints for visitors and staff now supplemented our existing questions about moving people through the museum. Though we still don’t have all the answers, here are the questions we are exploring in our research.

How might timed ticketing and reduced capacity support testing new visitor interactions?

A fixed number of visitors arriving at predetermined times presents an amazing opportunity to prototype things like self-guided story-driven experiences, redeploying visitor experience associates as visitor engagement leaders, and reimagining our entrance experience to focus more on engagement and less on transaction.

How might new experiences be designed to bridge online and in-gallery environments?

As we build new online tools that create deeper engagement with our collections, we’re also considering how to evolve our existing in-gallery digital experiences, like our multitouch digital tables and projection-based Immersion Room, to respond to new COVID-19 “touch” conditions and build in more value for visitors.

What might we learn from other arts and design disciplines?

Perhaps the greatest value of the Interaction Lab is our ability to collaborate with creative professionals in new ways. We are engaging choreographers, directors, and immersive performers to help us think differently about our spaces; working with information designers to expand interpretive approaches; and tapping digital humanities and the immersive storytelling community to prototype new tools for storytelling that might be applied to our collections and exhibitions.

session on storytelling and systems architecture with the Columbia University School of the Arts’ Digital Storytelling Lab.

Each program began with invited designers and practitioners framing the discussion, followed by workshops in which participants could apply those ideas for themselves. For example, in “Interpretation as Storytelling,” three experts spoke about aspects of their design practices—graphic design, interactive narrative design, and extended reality design—and their potential implication for museum practice. Then the designers led experiential workshops in the museum demonstrating how that technique might apply to reimagining museum labels, using Disney tactics for exhibition design, and creative concepting with augmented and virtual reality in-gallery. At the end, we reconvened to discuss our findings.

Creating this kind of playful, participatory space has proven hugely popular, especially for provoking meaningful connections among strangers. Based on the response from museum sector professionals and the public, it’s clear that a lab focused on visitor-facing interactions resonates across industries and interests. Feedback from post-program surveys has been consistently positive, with comments like “as a regular museum visitor, it was amazing to have the opportunity to discuss storytelling with the head of interpretation from a [major NYC museum].”

Though our public program series is the most visible manifestation of the Lab’s work, there’s much going on behind the scenes. In fact, the vast majority of our efforts are driven by insights surfaced through internal strategy and creative development.

Designing for Our Internal Audiences

In the Lab’s first year, we brought together various cross-departmental stakeholders from Cooper Hewitt in six workshops to reflect on what we’ve learned since the museum’s post-renovation reopening in 2014 and do some big thinking about the future. When necessary, we engaged workshop leaders, such as the museum-focused research firm Frankly, Green + Webb, for its keen insight on experiential strategy. In other sessions, we collaborated with groups of designers, storytellers, technologists, and outside partners like Facebook’s AI and New Experiences Team to



For her Bodystorming Access workshop, artist, producer, and educator Kayla Hamilton designed an experience combining improvisational movement and visual description.

“Investing small amounts of money in exploring multiple early stage ideas maximizes the impact we can generate with a modest budget.”



think about engagement strategies from other sectors that might be applicable.

In these workshops, we generated ideas about futures for collecting (the central interaction of our current museum experience), adding digital intelligence to our historic mansion, onboarding first-time visitors, and embedding storytelling capabilities in everything from how we store, manage, and serve collections data and digital content to the design of in-gallery experiences. Based on workshop outcomes, we have worked with other staff to prioritize where to focus our prototyping activities with external designers and partners. Then we’ll develop and scale individual ideas into a reimagined experience.

In addition to offering internal facilitation and sensemaking, the Lab is beginning to provide strategic design support for upcoming exhibitions and programs by researching and prototyping new approaches to design and interactivity based on visitor needs, internal objectives, and experiential goals.

Creative Commissioning as R&D

One of the primary ways we prototype ideas is by inviting designers and practitioners to work with us via the Interaction Lab Creative Commissioning Program. When we identify a design opportunity, we request proposals from independent designers, design studios, and creative technologists that outline solutions they want to explore with us. Then we award funding to prototype proofs of concept of the best submissions. Investing small amounts of money in exploring multiple early stage ideas maximizes the impact we can generate with a modest budget.

RESOURCES

“Recapping the View from Inside—Pandemic as Portal: Exploring the In-between” by Angela Perrone, Katherine Miller, and Rachel Ginsberg
bit.ly/2Gsmh8F

“Designing for Now: The Implications of ‘Going Online’” by Rachel Ginsberg
bit.ly/3jJUD5e

Our commissions are varied. While entry is timed and capacity reduced, we're working with design studios specializing in games and industrial design to explore the effectiveness of different kinds of storytelling approaches and interactive mechanics in guiding visitors through the physical museum. We're also actively exploring new applications for current interactive experiences, which include digital tables and our projection-based Immersion Room. And through next spring, we are working with a partner on new creative software applications for Open Access collections. This latter program commissions concepts from an open call for proposals to ensure that we create space for new practitioners with fresh ideas.

In addition to addressing specific needs, the design commissions help expand and challenge our thinking about museum experience and present opportunities to share our learnings through publications and public programs. To ensure we maximize the benefits of this approach, we're not only evaluating the prototypes themselves, but also tracking the impact of commissioning on the institution to help us refine our approach going forward.

Participants move their bodies in the Bodystorming Access workshop.



Co-creating with Partners

In creating a “lab without walls,” we conceived of a porous border between the museum and external partners, which include individual designers, design firms, tech companies, and community organizations, to name a few. Whether the partnership is focused on research, building tools or platforms, designing products and services, or something entirely different, we want to bring fresh eyes, voices, and ideas into the conversation and build relationships around common questions to serve shared or related audiences.

Presently, we're working with a tech company to prototype a storytelling-driven database that will link collections data to digital content from our website and other channels, allowing us to share richer, deeper, more connected stories with audiences of all kinds, both in-gallery and online. We're also collaborating with our CRM (customer relationship management) partner to rethink the entrance experience, including everything from the first web visit to the moment visitors enter the galleries: What's essential? What isn't? How might a redesigned ticketing interface better support the right kind of entry experience for Cooper Hewitt?

In addition, we plan to develop partnerships that explore strategies for deepening engagement with our exhibitions and collections and designing new pathways and experiences for visitors to interact with our historic mansion, both on- and offline.

What Now?

Before COVID-19 reached our shores, we planned to continue in-person public programming and begin commissioning prototypes through the spring and summer, and we expected to start sharing outcomes in the fall of 2020. Then everything changed. Like everyone else, we re-examined, adapted, and continue to adapt.

That the pandemic triggered a series of crises for museums is a clear indication that things already needed to change. After all, if museums aren't able to be physical spaces full of objects, supported by dynamic in-person programming, then what are they exactly, and for whom, and what might they be in the future?

We believe opportunity lies in envisioning medium- and long-term futures different from those we





A large group debrief with participants closes the Bodystorming Access workshop.

imagined before COVID-19 that go beyond simply responding to new constraints. The Interaction Lab's public contribution to this discourse thus far has been two online programs framed by Arundhati Roy's brilliantly articulated metaphor from her *Financial Times* article "Pandemic as Portal." Using this portal metaphor, we sent small groups of participants into Zoom breakout rooms to discuss prompts related to museum futures and used online whiteboarding software, Miro, to document together.

The first program, "Pandemic as Portal: Exploring the in-between," took place in early May, and welcomed almost 180 participants from 21 countries to share what they are currently seeing, feeling, and hoping to leave behind and what they want to bring with them into the future. In August, we ran our second program, "Pandemic as Portal: Preparing to emerge," which focused on the museum experience in this time before we emerge from our socially distant bubbles.

As for visitor experience strategy and commissioning, the pandemic has inspired bigger thinking about what's possible at Cooper Hewitt. During our closure, the Lab has supported and facilitated internal programming conversations and has proposed a research program to explore new ways to use our galleries and physical spaces. Moving forward, we will be initiating design commissions to explore content and experiences related to the new conditions we are experiencing (see "Moving Through a Museum in a Pandemic" sidebar on p. 50).

To expand the conversation beyond our walls, the Lab is convening a group of museum professionals across education, interpretation, curatorial, design, and visitor services, thanks to the generous support of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Through a combination of small group workshops and online public programs, the series will explore tactics for designing exciting museum experiences in person and at a distance. Rather than designing the workshops ourselves and inviting people to attend, we're testing an approach that invites participants into the process as collaborators, sharing among all who participate facilitation and documentation responsibilities, financial compensation, and authorship of the resulting toolkit.

The pandemic is a portal, certainly, but it's not yet clear how much of what's on the other side resembles the past. But we can learn from what has already happened over the months between closing and reopening. We can make the decision to approach this period as a series of opportunities and experiments, making space to prototype our way forward, learning and adapting as we go, and responding to new audience needs as they emerge.

Rachel Ginsberg is director of the Interaction Lab and **Carolyn Royston** is chief experience officer at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York City.



Supporting the Museum Field During a Time of Need

In recognition of the devastating impacts and lasting reach of COVID-19 on museum professionals, AAM has created a 2020 Special Membership specifically for those who have been financially impacted by the pandemic. Made possible through the generous support of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, this unique, six-month membership option offers digital access to the benefits of our Professional Membership for only \$25.

Now more than ever, it is crucial for museum professionals to stay abreast of important developments in our field, to grow and strengthen our skills and expertise, and to stay connected with our peers in the museum community. Benefits of this membership include access to AAM's member-only resource library; discounts on professional development programs, publications, reports, and toolkits in the AAM bookstore; a digital subscription to Museum magazine and our e-newsletters, *Aviso* and *Dispatches from the Future of Museums*; and access to our Professional Networks.

For more details about the 2020 Special Membership or to sign up for this offer, please visit aam-us.org/2020-special-membership.

Facing Change Initiative Now In Its Second Year

In 2018, the AAM undertook an unprecedented nationwide initiative to both train and diversify museum boards and leadership. Funded for three years by the Alice L. Walton Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, the Facing Change Initiative is now in its second year of supporting museums with their DEAI (diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion) work to inform their strategy and practices. Participants of this pilot initiative are based in five museum communities of learning around the country: Chicago; the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul; the Bay Area of California; Dallas/Fort Worth/Houston; and Jackson, Mississippi.

To date, these five museum communities of learning, with more than 1,700 museum leaders

and trustees participating, have completed in-person and virtual retreats and board DEAI and race equity training, prioritized goals and action steps to center equity at the board level, and have begun creating equity and inclusion plans. AAM and the participating Facing Change museums are eager to continue this critical work and share our learnings, findings, and results with the field. For more details, please visit aam-us.org/programs/facing-change1/.

Alliance Speakers and Advisors Offer Expertise

Alliance speakers and advisors are offering low-cost, virtual engagements to help museums, conferences, and companies respond to the challenges of 2021. You can book office hours with our staff to talk through issues related to diversity, planning, ethics, and standards; schedule live Q&A and moderated discussions around recorded lectures; and offer strategic workshops (via Zoom) to help your staff stay engaged with each other and the world. For more information

about services and to submit an inquiry about pricing, please visit aam-us.org/alliance-advisors.

Join Us for Museums Advocacy Day 2021 —Feb. 22–23!

For more than 10 years, Museums Advocacy Day has been providing the essential training and support advocates need to meet face-to-face with members of Congress and their staff in Washington, DC, and effectively make the case for museums. Advocating in support

of museums in February 2021 will undoubtedly look different than in past years, but it will be more important and impactful than ever.

Following the elections and with the convening of the 117th Congress, it will be critical for museum supporters and professionals to join forces to make our voices heard with new and returning legislators and their staff. It's up to us to ensure legislators understand the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the museum field.

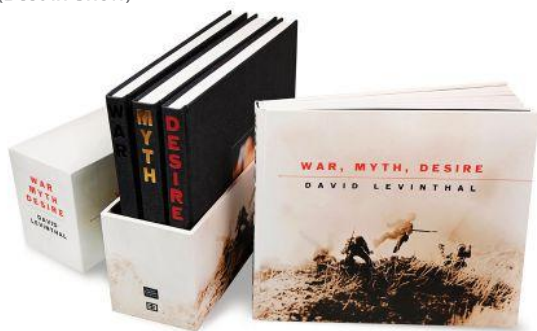
To maximize our collective voices and impact, we are preparing for a robust virtual Museums Advocacy Day in February. Museums Advocacy Day is a unique opportunity to unite with museum colleagues from across the country to reaffirm our essential value, collective contributions, and aspirations.

Make your plans today to participate in Museums Advocacy Day 2021 from wherever you are! Register now at aam-us.org/programs/museums-advocacy-day.

And the winner is...

David Levinthal: War, Myth, Desire
George Eastman Museum

Frances Smyth-Ravenel Prize for Publication Design
(Best in Show)



2020 AAM Museum Publications Design Competition

For a list of winners in all print media categories visit <https://www.aam-us.org/pub-comp>



Educators! A lightweight carry-around stacker for educational programs perfect for socially distanced learning!

**DURABLE
FORGIVING WOOD CONSTRUCTION
STEEL-REINFORCED**

THE MUSEUM STOOL®

A classic, in use in dozens of esteemed institutions

Order 20 now.

Call for a quote 202.309.9528

Shipped singly or in boxes of 5.

Carpet-covered cart available for transport and storage.



M&LF®

MandLF.com

TRIBUTES AND TRANSITIONS

New Jobs



Mary Baerg,
Chief Operating Officer, Space Center Houston, TX



Ruby Hunt,
Chief Human Resource Officer, Dallas Museum of Art, TX



Jamila Wicks,
Advancement Director, Illinois State Museum Society, Springfield



Jason Cryan,
Executive Director, Natural History Museum of Utah, Salt Lake City



Kersta Hurst,
Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Dallas Museum of Art, TX



Zinnia Willits,
Executive Director, Southeastern Museums Conference, Atlanta, GA



Kate Eilertsen,
Acting Executive Director, di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, Napa, CA



Petra Slinkard,
Director of Curatorial Affairs, The Nancy B. Putnam Curator of Fashion and Textiles, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA



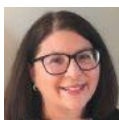
WHAT'S YOUR CAREER NEWS?
Tell us your news at bit.ly/CareerNewsAAM.



Chris Eisenberg,
Deputy Director and Director of Philanthropy and Communications, Natural History Museum of Utah, Salt Lake City



Allie Tscheulin,
Director of Marketing, National Museum of Wildlife Art, Jackson, WY



Beth Twiss Houting,
Executive Director, Schwenkfelder Library & Heritage Center, Pottsville, PA



Frederick Wallace,
Chief Conservator and Director of Conservation, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, IN

Advertiser Guide

AAM Museum Publications Design Competition page **55**

Annual Meeting page **31**

10-31
Inside Front Cover

1220 Exhibits, Inc page **11**

Development Year page **1**

Dumbarton House
Inside Back Cover

Dynamic Air Quality Solutions page **20**

ERCO Lighting, Inc page **3**

Freetouch page **18**

Lucidea page **21**

Mad Systems page **25**

Nubart page **19**

Museum and Library Furniture page **55**

Panphonics Oy page **22**

Rowman and Littlefield page **7**

Oasis Earth page **59**

Sensource, Inc page **23**

Tronvig page **24**

Seton Hall page **17**

Wallace Foundation
Back Cover

Wilkerson Consulting page **13**



Discussion Guide on Building Audiences

Using principles from The Wallace Foundation's *Building Audiences for Sustainability* initiative, this Discussion Guide is designed to prompt discussion between museum administrators, boards, and practitioners to inform their own practices, strategies, and operations.

THE AUDIENCE GOAL

1. Richard Florida writes about modern investments that have improved cities, but he points to stubborn challenges around making urban areas more inclusive and equitable. He also acknowledges that contemporary urban crises/successes are impacting suburban and exurban areas.

- *How do you characterize your museum's audience demographics?*
- *How does where people work, live, and recreate affect who visits your museum?*
- *How are you designing visitor outreach and experiences to address those different factors?*
- *What audiences are you currently engaging or would like to engage? Why?*

2. Although Richmond's Black residents comprise about half of the city's population, many felt that the Virginia Museum of History & Culture "wasn't a place for people like me." Jamie Bosket writes about how staff and the board confronted this perception problem head-on, listening, partnering, and making far-reaching changes.

- *What is the perception of your museum among different members of your community?*
- *Do all groups feel equally welcome?*
- *What are the explicit, as well as the implicit, messages that your museum projects to engage core, inactive, and missing visitors?*

INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE

1. Richard Florida relates how community anchors, including museums, serve as critical public spaces that connect people with other people, and Nik Honeysett advises that the cost of doing business now "requires an ongoing attention to cultural trends."

- *Prior to COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter protests, who visited your museum and for what types of events and/or experiences? Who was missing?*
- *Where are people gathering now?*

2. Josh Barr shares how the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum was designed to be as inclusive and accessible as possible. To ensure success, they involved stakeholders at every step of the process.

- *What community groups might you engage to ensure that your museum is truly accessible and inclusive?*
- *How do your planning, implementation, and assessment strategies include and incorporate diverse perspectives?*
- *What more can you do to accommodate all guests and ensure that everyone has similar and/or parallel experiences?*

MARKET RESEARCH ON BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

1. Arthur Cohen suggests that the current health and social justice crises highlight a fundamental need to redefine and reactivate the essential purpose of museums in our society. Museum stakeholders, internal and external, are demanding more collaboration, inclusivity, and access to experiences and practices where one can find meaning and relevance.

- *How can you find stakeholders, who, to paraphrase Jamie Bosket, know your museum, think they know your museum, and don't?*
- *What systems are in place to hear honest feedback about how well your museum serves these stakeholders?*
- *How does your museum encourage candid conversation among different stakeholders to generate new ideas and initiatives that break down barriers and build trust and relationships?*

2. As museums reopen in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, potential visitors are concerned about health and safety and traveling to urban areas.
 - *What precautions are you putting in place to care for staff and visitors?*
 - *How are you communicating new behaviors and norms to your various stakeholders?*
 - *Can you partner with local businesses and organizations to enhance and extend the sense of safety about the museum experience?*
3. Nik Honeysett writes that digital-first content can expand museum audiences.
 - *Are you finding increased and more diverse audience participation with your digital content? How are you evaluating this?*
 - *What strategies can you employ to learn from these new users, especially about how to sustain and deepen these relationships?*
 - *The skills described for digital visitor engagement necessitate new cross-departmental relationships. How might your organization adapt to accommodate and incorporate this new expertise?*

THINKING THROUGH THE RELATIONSHIP

1. Jamie Bosket writes that in creating strategic initiatives that aim for a programmatic portfolio and team that reflect the community, partnerships are key.
 - *What opportunities does your museum have to partner with local groups and institutions to strengthen your position in the community?*
 - *What resources and assets can you bring to a partner relationship?*
2. Rachel Ginsberg and Carolyn Royston write that “if museums aren’t able to be physical spaces full of objects, supported by dynamic in-person programming, then what are they exactly, and for whom, and what might they be in the future?”
 - *As audiences develop new ways to interact with your museum, have their interests and behaviors changed?*
 - *What strategies have you put in place to monitor, track, and communicate with these audiences to help guide your institutional priorities?*

- *Who can support your in-house team in imagining new ways to think about using museum assets and resources to provide opportunities for community partners and more relevant audience engagement?*

DESIGNING NEW STRATEGIES TO WELCOME AND ENGAGE

1. In addition to the physical design elements at the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum that ensure all visitors have shared and comfortable experiences, visitors can make accessibility choices in galleries.
 - *What choices do you offer your visitors to personalize their needs and interests?*
 - *How are visitor needs and interests recognized and supported through all aspects of their museum visit—from their initial inquiry, orientation, and on-site experience to any post-visit follow-up?*
2. Richard Florida affirms that museums play a critical role in offering shared spaces that contribute to our well-being. And Arthur Cohen writes that museums need to offer experiences that support relaxation, distraction, connectedness, and learning.
 - *Do audiences see your museum as a place “to help, to understand, and to just make people feel better?”*
 - *What are your best examples of strategies that support an audience’s social, emotional, and functional needs? Are there other community-based models you can learn from?*

ALIGNING THE ORGANIZATION AROUND THE STRATEGY

1. Rachel Ginsberg and Carolyn Royston share insights from the Interaction Lab that enhance visitor engagement, including digital intelligence, onboarding first-time visitors, and embedding storytelling in aspects of their work.
 - *What approaches would you identify to improve visitor engagement in your museum?*
 - *What roles and responsibilities might different members of your museum staff and board assume to imagine, prototype, and evaluate new strategies?*
2. Jamie Bosket writes how his institution “stepped

out of the museum’s comfort zone” to host a celebration that renamed the street in front of the museum and introduced a re-envisioned institution ready to address the layered history of Virginia and its own complicated institutional record.

- *How might your museum step out of its “comfort zone” to change its perception and relationships with its communities?*
- *Do you have a staff that reflects your community/communities, and, if not, what initiatives can you institute to make changes?*
- *How can you assess whether your programs address the interests and concerns of your community?*

BUILDING IN ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING

1. Arthur Cohen writes that, in the future,

“collaborative leadership” will be defined in a more expansive and porous way.

- *Do you have a broad mix of stakeholders represented as you prioritize resources and develop strategies?*
- *Do you have both staff and board members who represent different demographics and communities?*
- *Do you have external friends who honestly share perceptions and prospects about building better relationships and deepening visitor engagement?*

This discussion guide was developed by Sonnet Takahisa, museum educator and principal at Arts and Cultural Strategies, Inc.




OASIS EARTH
Planet in Peril

Our Last Best Chance to Save Our World
RICK STEINER

With hundreds of stunning images from NASA and the U.N. International Photographic Competition for the Environment, Oasis Earth weaves a journey through the extraordinary diversity of life on Earth, the interrelated causes of global ecological collapse, and the path to a livable future.

E-book available FREE here:
www.oasis-earth.com/oasis-earth-planet-in-peril





Print Version Available at **amazon**

Presentation of Oasis Earth available in person or virtually
Contact: richard.g.steiner@gmail.com

REFLECTION



This quiet roof, where dove-sails saunter by,
Between the pines, the tombs, throbs visibly.
Impartial noon patterns the sea in flame—
That sea forever starting and re-starting.
When thought has had its hour, oh how rewarding
Are the long vistas of celestial calm!
What grace of light, what pure toil goes to form
The manifold diamond of the elusive foam!
What peace I feel begotten at that source!
When sunlight rests upon a profound sea,
Time's air is sparkling, dream is certainty—

Excerpted from *The Graveyard by the Sea* by Paul Valéry

Instagram @kris.from.brooklyn

WHERE AMERICA BECAME AMERICA™



GREAT™
AMERICAN
TREASURES

START AT

Dumbarton House

in Georgetown — Washington, DC.

Then discover 60+ treasures, **BIG** and *small*, that tell the real story of how America became America.

V I S I T

GREATAMERICANTREASURES.ORG



DUMBARTON HOUSE

Visit this Federal period estate online to discover a unique view of life in early Washington, D.C. through virtual programming and educational resources

www.dumbartonhouse.org

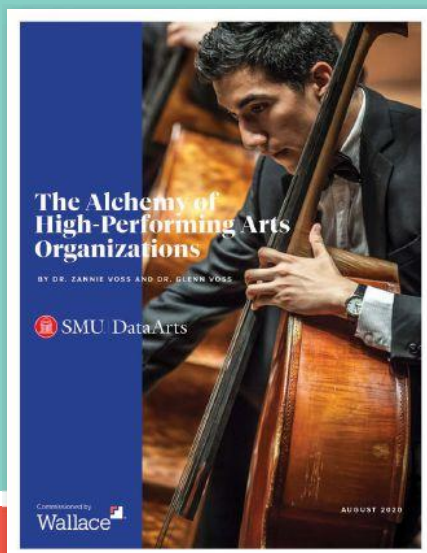
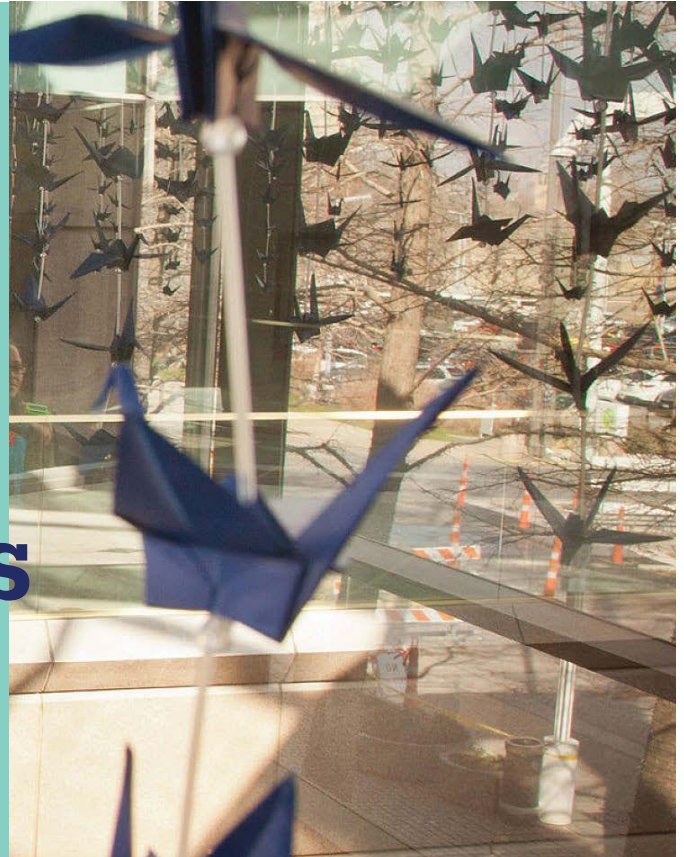


**American
Alliance of
Museums**

2451 Crystal Drive, Suite 1005
Arlington, VA 22202

A BENEFIT OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE
AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS

How do high- performing arts organizations maintain their magic?



The Alchemy of High-Performing Arts Organizations

New research identifies strategies and practices 20 successful arts organizations share, according to the leaders of those organizations.

Download this report and many more free resources:
www.wallacefoundation.org

Wallace 