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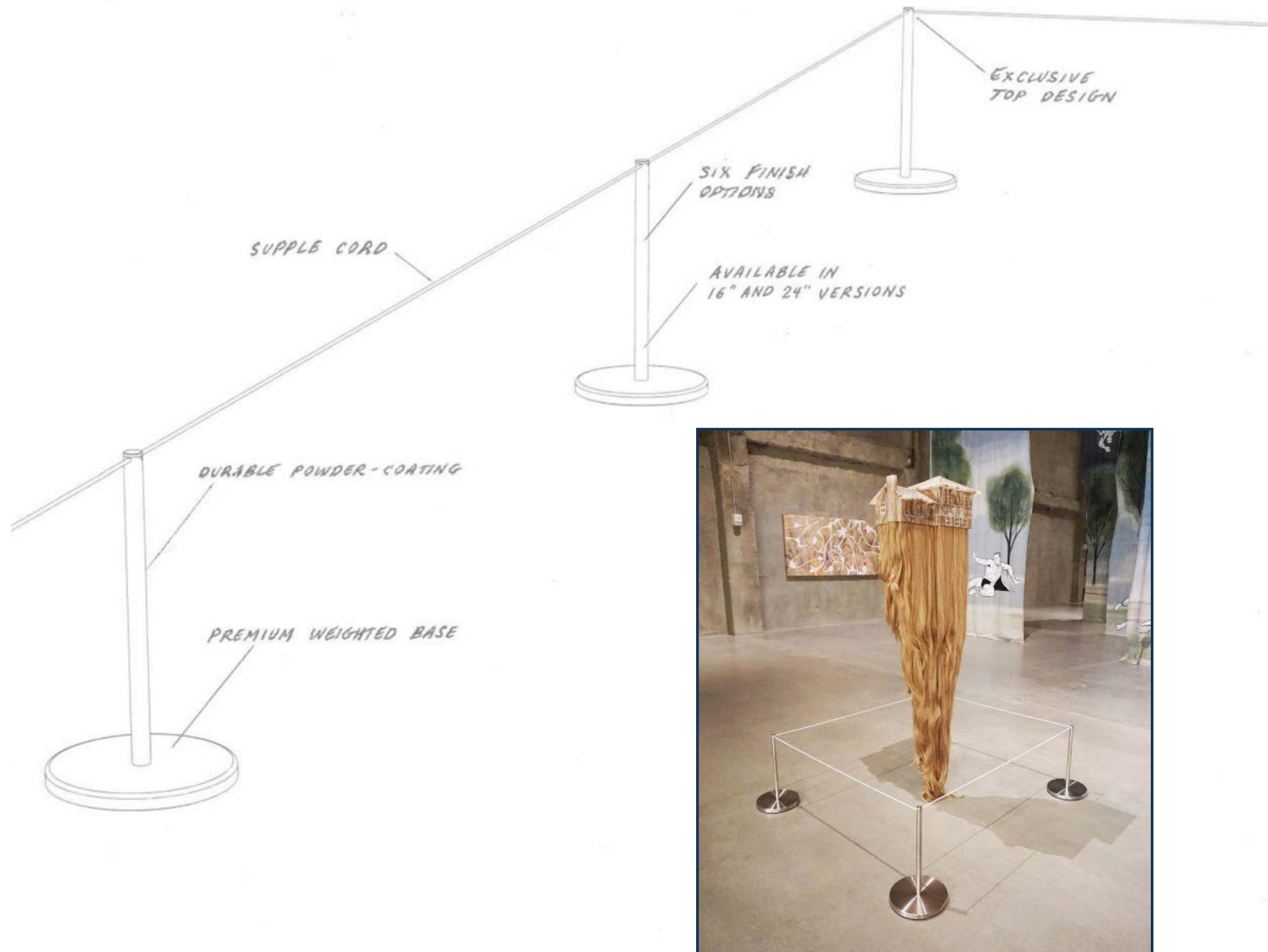
# MUSEUM



## Creative Aging



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**Cover photo by:**  
Sara Lowenburg/Louisiana State Museum



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# Join the Creative Aging Movement

**Thanks to science** and medical advances, humans are living longer than ever before and contributing in many new ways across our communities. The sad news is that as people age, they are often pushed to the margins of society and face worsening ageism. Age discrimination is compounded by other forms of oppression, inflicting disproportionate harm on communities already marginalized by our systems. Tackling this form of discrimination is an important dimension of our diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) work.

Combating ageism is of particular importance as the COVID-19 pandemic deprives older adults of activities that bring them joy and belonging. The physical isolation required for safety exacerbates social isolation, inflicting its own damage on physical and mental health. Extensive research shows the transformative effect that arts and culture engagement can have on health and aging, but we face a cruel paradox. As people age, they often have both more time and increased desire for creative outlets but fewer opportunities to meet these needs.

By 2035 in the United States, people over the age of 65 and children 17 and younger will constitute more than half of the country's population. How could museums, and society, be transformed if elders' learning was just as supported as that for schoolchildren? Museums could be the educational constant of American life, providing engaging, immersive, self-directed learning opportunities for the oldest as well as the youngest. In fact, spurring curiosity and lifelong learning—two museum superpowers—can increase our capacity for empathy and inclusive attitudes. This can posit museums as the social glue of our increasingly fragmented society, building connections between generations and fostering greater inclusion for all our communities.

In 2018, AAM and Aroha Philanthropies launched an innovative partnership to encourage museums to tackle this challenge on two levels. As trusted and influential institutions, museums can combat ageism and promote a healthy change in societal attitudes toward aging. Turning that lens inward, museums can improve their own intergenerational competency and identify what they can do to serve the overlooked needs of the oldest segments of their communities.

Over the past year, even as they had to close to the public, museums across the country rose to the challenge, providing respite, relief, and sources of connection for older adults. At the leading edge of this effort were 20 museums already engaging older adults through creative aging workshops. With funding from Aroha Philanthropies and training provided by Lifetime Arts, these museums, participants in the Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums (SVA) program, were providing high-quality, intensive arts programming to people over the age of 55. As the pandemic prevented in-person interactions, educators at the SVA museums reached out by phone, email, and Zoom meetings to provide social connection and meaningful experiences to a segment of the public that has been disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19 crisis.

In this issue of *Museum* magazine, you will read about some of these creative aging programs, recounted by the museum professionals providing them. I encourage you to join their movement and change the narrative of what it means to grow old in America.



7/16/21

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

# Creative Aging

**2035**

Year when the US population will have more adults over the age of 65 than children.

**17%**

Percentage of the population age 55 or older that visits a museum at least once a year.

**21%**

Percentage of the US population 55 or older.

**50%**

Percentage of older adults who say they suffer from moderate or extreme loneliness.

Sources: Clockwise from top: culturetrack.com; census.gov; campaigntoendloneliness.org/the-facts-on-loneliness/; census.gov; By the Numbers was compiled by Susie Wilkening, principal of Wilkening Consulting, wilkeningconsulting.com. Reach Susie at Susie@wilkeningconsulting.com.





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## UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL



We asked some of the participants in the creative aging programs featured in this issue to share with us their expectations or needs from museums as an older adult.

**Gayle Brickert-Albrecht**  
**Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson**

I expect the museum to act as a site of confluence. I want a space that actively nurtures engagement and inclusion across supposed social, cultural, and political boundaries. As a mature nonbinary queer, I'm increasingly disenchanted with the homogeneous groupings that are deemed "good for me" by well-meaning organizers. I instead seek out experiences that are intergenerational, socially flexible, and place me in conversation with divergent perspectives.

**Melanie Gray**  
**Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson**

Museums are an important part of my life as an artist, educator, and art therapist. As an older person, reasonable accommodations are important. Museums are often expensive to visit, and people on fixed incomes cannot afford to visit. I would like funding to be available for elders to visit museums. The experience of being present with works of art is empowering. Reproductions and videos can't replace the feelings, the smells, the size, the lighting, and presentation of an artwork. Paintings and sculptures have actual presence.

**Aarafa Payne**  
**Louisiana State Museum**

I expect museums to provide a vision of what was, what can be, and what is. Museum space in some magical way stimulates my creative process as an older adult. The same life routines on a daily basis dull my imagination. Museums provide a refuge from those routines and an artistic space for my imagination to roam freely.

### 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](https://bit.ly/MuseumNewsAAM), and it might be featured in an upcoming issue.

**Lee Eaton**

**Louisiana State Museum**

Free, easy access to museums is important to me as an older adult. I typically budget for one membership; access to more is greatly appreciated. I have never felt so connected to local museums as I did when attending the art and music classes offered by the Louisiana State Museum. The topics were of interest to me, and the attendance commitment served as a catalyst to not only visit but to fully experience the spaces so thoughtfully created by so many.



**Warren Miller**

**Louisiana State Museum**

Museums have been a part of my life since the very early years. Viewing the work of different artists still intrigues me. Though I have never thought of myself as an artist, it is exciting to see what is in my mind transported to paper and sewn onto a canvas, and even create music through the beat of a drum.



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## UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL



### **Sheri Skelton** **Anchorage Museum**

Museums are vibrant and alive with the stories of people from the past as well as the present. They are places that provide insight into art, culture, and the social and political climate. I enjoy wandering through museums, reading, observing, contemplating. As an older adult, my connection to museums has only increased. The Anchorage Museum has provided an opportunity for me to interact and learn with fellow older adults.



### **Robin Wohl** **Naples Botanical Garden**

Museums and programs geared to older adults reach out to us as “forever learners.” We are able to relate to both our fellow students and the younger, enthusiastic facilitators (often for technology support!). Museums give us that permission to learn without judgment and to achieve as much as we want, or just to dabble.



### **Carmina Rodríguez Villa** **Naples Botanical Garden**

As I grow older, and maybe wiser, I need museums because they give me hope for the future of humankind. In museums we can observe that people can, and do, survive natural disasters, wars, persecutions, plagues, famines, and dislocation from their homes and still maintain what makes us human.

### **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](https://bit.ly/MuseumNewsAAM), and it might be featured in an upcoming issue.

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# Why Creative Aging?

It's more than personal—it's societal.

By Maura O'Malley

## I began thinking about

becoming “old” in my mid-40s when I was a caregiver for my energetic, intelligent, and creative aunt. Over the course of 10 years, while I was working in the K–12 arts education arena and raising a family, I moved her (then in her mid-80s) from her apartment in New York City to independent living, then assisted living, then to a memory care unit, and eventually to a skilled nursing facility.

During this time, I witnessed very few moments where she expressed true joy or exhibited a sense of belonging or purpose. I began to think about my own old age and what I could do to help preserve vitality. This is the moment when I connected the aging process with what I knew about the benefits of arts education.

Creative aging programs honor older adults as creative and social learners and help shift the narrative about growing older away from a negative view to one of optimism, engagement in community, and joy.

Creative aging was in its infancy back in the early 2000s, with only small pockets of activity—no real



A creative aging painting workshop at Olana State Historic Site in New York.

©2018 Molinski Photography

infrastructure, no professional networks, no training. My colleague Ed Friedman, a fellow veteran arts administrator, and I recognized that few organizations offered arts programs for older adults beyond passive entertainment or one-off events. We saw that they needed help to design, fund, and sustain arts education programs specifically aimed at older adults.

When Dr. Gene Cohen's **Creativity and Aging Study** was published in 2006, it provided the ballast that we needed to launch Lifetime Arts. Essentially, Cohen's research demonstrated that skills-based arts learning, in a socially supportive environment, yielded multiple benefits for older learners—not the least of which was its intrinsic value in reducing social isolation. He proved what we arts administrators have always known: the arts are good for you.

### Who Are We Calling “Older Adults”?

For older adults contending with social isolation, these arts education programs build community and create new social connections. At Lifetime Arts, we use the term “older adults” to describe folks aged 55 and better. This term—as opposed to “seniors” or “elderly”—is broader and more inclusive, and it is often preferred by the participants themselves.

The Pew Research Center estimates that by 2035 there will be more people over the age of 65 than children under 17. With the population aging at an unprecedented rate, this demographic shift is not just a blip, but a permanent

change in the makeup of the world population. Creative aging programs focus on adults 55–100 who are otherwise diverse in every way possible: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, access to technology, geographic location, and population density.

This multigenerational 50-year span includes everyone from people who finally have time to follow creative pursuits to retirees experiencing isolation after their built-in social network dissipates. It also includes empty nesters and those whose familial relationships have shifted due to relocation or loss. It includes people with and without partners, and the many people who are living into their 80s and 90s.

Yet, most of us still categorize older adults as “other”—some alien group. No one is out of the “Aging Club.” If you are alive, you are a member. As activist Ashton Applewhite says, “We are all aging, so ageism is actually a prejudice against our future selves.”

### The Lifetime Arts Approach

Meeting Lifetime Arts' overarching goal to enhance the lives of older adults through arts education requires nothing less than facilitating a cultural shift around how community organizations serve older adults. Our work is centered on building individual and institutional capacity to design, deliver, and sustain meaningful creative aging programming. Through our training, coaching, technical assistance, and resources, we offer practical support through a positive, modern, and social lens.



We positioned ourselves as a service organization because we knew early on that embracing older adults as creative learners is a challenge for all types of organizations. We have witnessed ageism at work at every level of engagement and so we include significant training around implicit ageism and its impact on program design and delivery. We aim for institutional/system-level partnerships that can affect and sustain change locally and at scale, building capacity from the top down and the bottom up.

Whether working with an arts, cultural, or senior service organization, we find that programmers and funders need to understand the cognitive, social, and emotional facets of aging and the efficacy of arts education programming in supporting positive aging. They

Participants in a creative aging program at The Neon Museum in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Lifetime Arts  
[lifetimearts.org](http://lifetimearts.org)

AAM Creative Aging page  
[aam-us.org/category/creative-aging/](http://aam-us.org/category/creative-aging/)

The Creative Aging Resource  
[creativeagingresource.org](http://creativeagingresource.org)

need a replicable, scalable model to develop programs that reflect new scholarship on aging; qualified arts partners to facilitate programming; training to help them initiate, implement, and sustain this very new approach to “senior” programs; and a network of supportive peers who share their mission and can help communicate the value of creative aging activities. Teaching artists who are interested and/or experienced in working with older adults need guidance to help them adapt their curricula and their delivery for older adults—and they need information on how to navigate the world of senior service.

The creative aging model that we promote is based on best practices in arts education; the work is student centered, participatory, sequential and skills-based. The added ingredient of intentional social engagement is what differentiates this model from other adult programs. We’ve learned that older adults are serious about what they choose to study and how they want to learn. They come to the learning with personal goals and practical objectives. They bring with them decades of life experience, which enriches their work. When

offered thoughtful, well-designed learning programs, these new arts learners gain confidence, create new and lasting friendships, and often renew their dedication to the host organization.

### Strategic Considerations for Museums

For cultural organizations like museums, creative aging extends their reach; advances their educational, cultural, and social missions; builds new community partnerships; and creates new funding streams. With AAM’s involvement, many museums are enthusiastically joining the creative aging movement and contributing to its growth with innovative programming that others can learn from. (Visit [aam-us.org/category/creative-aging](https://aam-us.org/category/creative-aging) to read about a few such programs.)

Museums have an opportunity and an obligation to realign their programs and services to address the needs and interests of today’s older adults. How museums respond to this challenge will determine to what extent they thrive in this new reality. Following are two tips on how to achieve success.

**Build toward institutionalization by looking beyond the**

**grant.** Integrating creative aging programs into your museum’s menu of services should trigger an examination of the impact that this new programming will have on organizational resources—staffing, facilities, budget, leadership. This should include evaluating how resources are allocated for current programs. Do certain long-standing programs need to be maintained in light of shifting goals or a changing patron base? Can resources be allocated more effectively? Are your proposed programs responsive to your community? Are they a natural extension of your primary work? Does the programming leverage your assets? Is there support from the board? From senior leadership?

**Pursue cross-sector and multilevel partnerships to build, fund, and sustain successful creative aging programming.**

Multiple federal, state, and local agencies and organizations count older adults as constituents deserving of focused, responsive service and support. Program providers in the arts, health, aging, veterans, and parks and recreation sectors, as well as public-private partnerships, have the potential


## QUESTIONS FOR MUSEUM TEAMS TO CONSIDER

- How might you think about older adults differently?
- Who in your museum is charged with thinking about/serving older adults?
- What educational programs do you offer? To whom?
- Who are your community partners?
- How are your educational programs funded?
- What do you know about what older adults want from your museum?
- Do you provide programs outside of the museum? In the community?
- What is your current approach toward multigenerational programming?



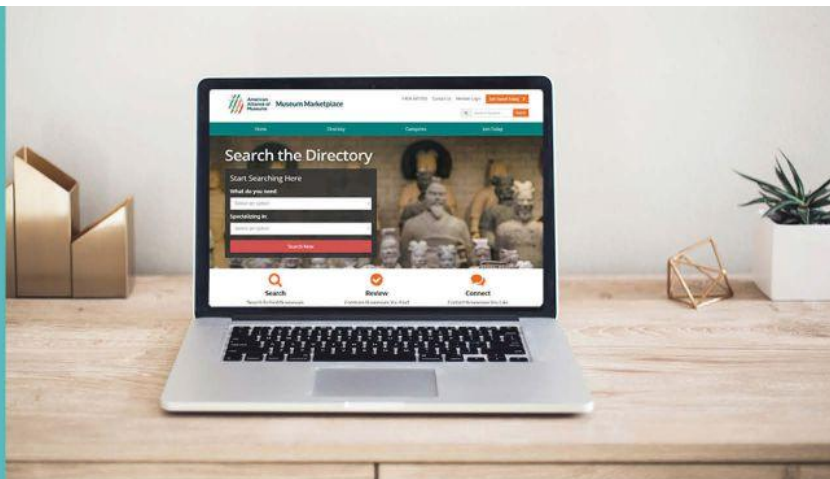
to collectively impact the quality of older adults' lives in America. Creative aging programming is furnishing a fertile field for these collaborations to grow. Current Lifetime Arts partnerships include the Brooklyn Public Library and New York Community Trust, Wyoming State Library and Wyoming Arts Council, Idaho Commission on the Arts and Idaho Division of Veterans Services, New York State Council on the Arts, New York State Office for the Aging and Area Agencies on Aging, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Aroha Philanthropies, and many more.

The work we all do together to improve the lives of older adults through creative aging is making a positive difference on multiple levels. It is not only transforming and enriching the lives of individuals who participate in arts education workshops, but also motivating organizations to take a fresh look at how best to engage all learners in meaningful and beneficial ways. American museums of every size and type are welcomed partners.

  
**Maura O'Malley** is co-founder and CEO of Lifetime Arts, a

nonprofit organization that provides training, technical assistance, and resources to organizations, institutions, and government agencies to encourage creative aging by supporting the creation, expansion, and sustainability of arts education programs for older adults. Lifetime Arts has supported the implementation of nearly 1,000 creative aging programs in more than 750 organizations across 35 states and has trained over 3,500 teaching artists and cultural and community organization professionals.

In need of hand-sanitizer stations, or translation services? Head to Museum Marketplace, the one-stop-shop for products and services that help museums run smoothly at any time. Search by dozens of categories, including location and type of service. Many providers are offering free or discounted pricing to ease the impacts of the pandemic on museums.



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# The Tao of Creative Aging

Museums that offer creative aging programs can help their communities embrace happiness and combat ageism, creating a better quality of life for everyone.

By Marjorie Schwarzer



“In the long process of aging, your personal process of daily discovery is ongoing. You continue to learn more and more about yourself every day.”

—Bruce Lee

## Gung Fu master

**Bruce Lee** was famous for his powerful punches and kicks. Less known, but perhaps more important, was his underlying philosophy of life. To Lee, martial arts were a pragmatic endeavor: a set of exercises to build physical strength and skill. But Lee's quest was also spiritual. He believed in the Tao, a path we can all take toward harmony with the flows of nature and within ourselves. Embracing this journey will lead to a person's most important achievement: happiness. At the same time, Lee's teachings emphasized the importance of fending off the negative forces that impede our pursuit of joyfulness.

These same ideas can be found in the creative aging movement. On the one hand, creative aging is a pragmatic endeavor. Its programs seek to serve a rapidly growing demographic. AAM and Aroha's Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums initiative provides a useful road map and set of resources to get started. To fully understand the power of creative aging, however, it is important to look at its larger philosophical aims: 1) cultivating happiness; and 2) fending off the ageism that can undermine this goal.

By considering these ideas more closely, museums have an opportunity to realign themselves

with the flows of nature, creating a better quality of life not just for our elders, but for all of us.

## Happiness vs. Ageism

Like the Tao, happiness cannot be defined. This hasn't prevented researchers from trying. Psychologists and scientists have pinpointed the behaviors most linked to attaining joyfulness. A deep form of happiness occurs, they say, when people maintain strong social networks, give back to others, and challenge their bodies or minds beyond their comfort zones. That is why creative aging programs emphasize socializing, volunteering, and developing a rigorous artistic practice. Even though this sounds serious, having fun is also part of the equation.

Few would dispute that happiness is good for the soul. As it turns out, it is also good for our physical health. Using quantitative tools, longitudinal studies, and brain scans, scientists have confirmed that positive emotions strengthen brain neuroplasticity and improve memory recall. Happiness decreases anxiety and other mental health afflictions. It boosts immunity. Happy people heal more quickly from illnesses. They are more productive in the workplace. They cope better with the inevitable losses and physical

deterioration that come with elderhood. Older people who describe themselves as happy outlive those with negative attitudes about the aging process by an average of seven and a half years.

There's more good news. Studies confirm what many elders have already intuited: our ability to achieve happiness increases as we approach elderhood. Since we are more experienced at life, we know what and who to avoid. We devote our time to activities that are most meaningful to us. We cultivate positive relationships. These behaviors, which creative aging programs seek to nurture, have been shown to augment happiness. Yet an insidious force works against older people's increased capacity for joyfulness: ageism.

Ageism is so prevalent in society that the World Health Organization has declared it a public health crisis. Ageist behaviors like ignoring, distrusting, diminishing, or talking down to older people or restricting their access to healthful activities diminishes their self-esteem. This leads to social isolation, loneliness, depression, and other mental health issues. According to a National Institutes of Health study, people and institutional settings that "activate" age stereotypes for older adults trigger brain changes related to dementia.

“Offering high-quality programs that are affordable and accessible to older adults is a pragmatic application of creative aging that meets an immediate societal need.”



### What Museums Can Do

Just as the martial arts call on practitioners to combat the negative forces that block their paths, creative aging advocates understand the urgency of unblocking society's biases toward older people. The more paths institutions like museums can open for older people to fulfill their potential and give back to society, the better life will be for them and their families. Happier, healthier, more engaged older adults will place fewer burdens on the health care system and increase workplace productivity. We need to see promoting deep happiness and combating the ageism that impedes it as a social good.

Offering high-quality programs that are affordable and

accessible to older adults is a pragmatic application of creative aging that meets an immediate societal need. Creating meaningful volunteer opportunities and improving the accessibility of physical and virtual spaces are other practical steps that museums can take to support elders.

Museums should also combat ageism by incorporating anti-ageist awareness within current diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) initiatives. This includes constructive intergenerational dialogues about racism, social equity, and other injustices that are deeply embedded within the museum field. Unless people of all ages can work together with empathy and mutual respect, ageism will persist into future generations.

Creative aging's emphasis on meaningful social relationships, altruism, and rigorous engagement with challenging practices can benefit people of all ages. But it goes beyond individuals. Being anti-ageist and pro-happiness is a powerful one-two punch that can help museums create more harmony within themselves and their communities.

**Marjorie Schwarzer** recently retired from the University of San Francisco where she served as administrative director and professor of museum studies. She is the author of *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: A History of Museums in the United States* and *Museums and Creative Aging: A Healthful Partnership*.

## RESOURCES

AAM's Museums and Creative Aging  
[aam-us.org/programs/museums-creative-aging/](http://aam-us.org/programs/museums-creative-aging/)

Aroha Philanthropies' Vitality Arts programs  
[arohaphilanthropies.org/vitality-arts/](http://arohaphilanthropies.org/vitality-arts/)

Stanford Center for Longevity  
[longevity.stanford.edu](http://longevity.stanford.edu)

Louise Aronson, *Elderhood: Redefining Aging, Transforming Medicine, Reimagining Life*, 2019

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, 2008

Ashton Appelwhite, *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism*, 2019

# NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

FORT BELVOIR, VIRGINIA

## WAR DECLARED

The Steam-Boat of last evening.

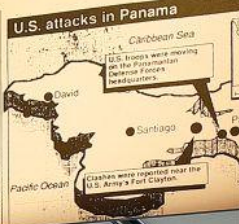
1812

### U.S. forces invade

Bush orders troops to approach

### Berlin's Brandenburg crossing to be opened

1989



The following...  
ed about here, and it was reprinted in the  
curiosity of the Public  
By his Excellency, the Hon. THOMAS GAGE  
Governor and Commander in Chief, in and for  
His Majesty's province of Massachusetts Bay, and Vice  
Admiral of the same.

### PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS the infatuated multitudes, who  
have long suffered themselves to be conducted  
in a fatal progression of crimes, against the constitutional  
authority of the States, against the solemnity  
of the King's government, and the good order  
of the Kingdom, have at length proceeded to  
frustrate, and are now rendering hopeless, the  
influence of the same evil counsels; it only remains  
for those who are entrusted with supreme power, as  
well for the punishment of the guilty, as for the  
relief of the well-affected, to bear the sword in  
vain.

The infringements which have been committed  
upon the most sacred rights of the Crown and people  
of Great-Britain, are too many to enumerate on  
one side, and are all too atrocious to be palliated  
on the other. All unprejudiced people who have  
heard of these transactions, in this and the  
neighbouring Kingdoms, in this and the  
neighbouring Colonies, and in this and the  
neighbouring parts of the world, are naturally  
indignant, and are naturally desirous to see  
justice done, and are naturally desirous to see  
the authors of these transactions punished.

### NEWBURGH THEATRE

BY AUTHORITY,  
President of the United States of America,  
PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS combinations to defeat  
the laws laying duties within the United States, and upon  
the commencement of those laws  
of the western parts of Pennsylvania  
he said combinations, proceed  
equally of the just authority of  
of the rights of individuals, have  
their dangerous and criminal pur-  
poses of certain irregular meetings,  
have tended to encourage and up-  
hold, by misrepresentations of the  
truth, to render them odious, by endeavor-  
ing to deprive them of the protection  
of the law, and to compel them to  
accept such offices by actual force  
or forbear the execution of them  
indictive menaces against all those  
directly or indirectly aid in the execution

Having the Revolutionary War, George Washington, as commander of the  
Continental Army took his orders from the Continental Congress, unlike  
representatives who directed the war effort. After the war, when some  
of the Army's officers wanted to threaten the fledgling government,  
Washington appeared before them at a tense meeting in Westbury,  
New York, and convinced them that for the new nation to succeed the  
Army must remain under civilian control.

tingoiled appendage of public liberty, and when  
fairly and impartially employed its best support, has  
tended to encourage and uphold, by misrepresentations of the  
truth, to render them odious, by endeavoring to deprive them of the protection  
of the law, and to compel them to accept such offices by actual force  
or forbear the execution of them indictive menaces against all those  
directly or indirectly aid in the execution

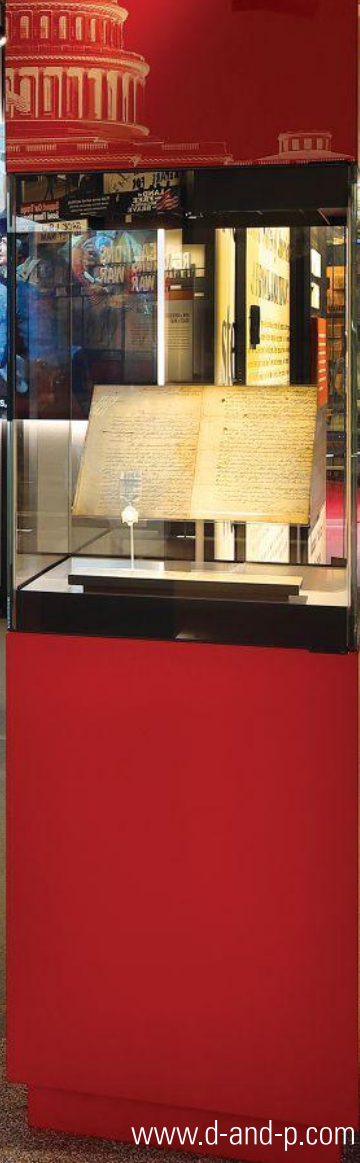
11,800,364. The estimates  
of the last appropriation bill  
were 10,000, and there was a



In a moment of great courage, he stood with his officers.

SECURITY  
OF DEFENSE  
COMMAND  
IONAL GUARD  
OF DEFENSE  
POSSIBLY  
THE PENNAG  
CONTROL-MIT

## ARMY CONTROL OF THE MILITARY



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UCER MAGNOLIA  
MORNINGSIDE

# SPRING



SOUTHERN  
MAGNOLIA



TULIP  
VIA BOTANICAL  
GARDENS

CAMELLIA  
JENNA'S YARD



ELLE

# Continuing to

# GROW

A nature journaling class at Naples Botanical Garden connects older adults to the institution, the natural world, and each other.

By Britt Patterson-Weber

**E**ducators in museums and gardens consider age-appropriate program structure all of the time, but is that same consideration given to programming for audiences whose grade-school years are long passed? Are adult programs passive entertainment when they could be connecting people with collections in a transformative way?

These were some of the questions on the minds of educators at Naples Botanical Garden in Florida in the summer of 2018. The garden, which opened in 2009, had recently undertaken its first comprehensive audience survey and was evaluating current offerings. The median age of the community surrounding the garden was 52 and steadily climbing, but adult programming was missing the mark.

Nature journaling participant Ellen depicted how she observes the plants in her garden in this final piece for the culminating exhibition.





Learning how to use portable materials in the field is an integral part of this nature journaling course.

The garden eliminated much of its adult education programs in the ensuing months, but one program evaded the chopping block: nature journaling, which had been offered for several years as a stand-alone class. Unlike the other art classes that were eliminated, this class *could* serve the garden’s mission to connect people to plants and support meaningful connections between adult learners and the garden’s natural landscapes and collections of tropical plants. There was potential for these students to learn about nature and themselves as they reflected in their journal writings. There was even a possibility for sharing their creative

works inspired by the garden with the public. But the garden was unsure how to make that happen.

In truly fortuitous timing, the Aroha Philanthropies Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums grant opportunity arrived just as the garden prepared to end this program. With guidance from Aroha Philanthropies’ technical partner Lifetime Arts, in just a few months this one-off class transformed into a successful eight-week sequential skill-based arts program tailored to adults over 55.

### More Than an Art Class

In a region full of art centers, the garden’s “Nature Journaling: Botany Through Art” is much more than an art class. Instead of just teaching skills—like how to use watercolor pencils or draw a leaf—the nature journaling program features deliberate social engagement that fosters friendships within the class and builds community.

Art classes can be intimidating to beginner artists, especially older adults who may be trying creative expression for the first time. The garden’s program is designed with beginners in mind and, through creative icebreakers, puts everyone at ease. Mary Helen Reuter, the garden’s curator of education and visitor experience, begins each class in the eight-week session with an activity that is relevant to the course content and designed to encourage students to engage with each other. Classes range in size from 10 to 14 participants.

The first icebreaker is the “Birthday Bloom” activity. Students find their “birthday horoscope” in the book *A Bloom a Day: A Fortune-Telling Birthday Book*. Each page features a vibrant flower photograph and text that describes the bloom and theoretically reveals the personality and fortune of those born on that day. Students share their horoscope and discuss whether it resonates with them—or if it is wildly off base. This activity is a fun plant-centric way to loosen up and learn more about each student’s personality.

“Building in time for students to get familiar with each other in the beginning of the class creates a safe space for the sharing sessions at the end of class,” says Reuter. These activities also allow Reuter and professional teaching artist Elizabeth Smith to learn more about the students on a personal level, which helps

## RESOURCES

*A Bloom A Day: A Fortune-Telling Birthday Book*, written by Billie Lythberg and Sian Northfield, photographs by Ron van Dongen

John Muir Laws, Nature Stewardship Through Science, Education, and Art  
[johnmuirlaws.com](http://johnmuirlaws.com)

Aroha Philanthropies  
[arohaphilanthropies.org/vitality-arts/](http://arohaphilanthropies.org/vitality-arts/)

Elizabeth Smith, teaching instructor  
[natureartjournal.blogspot.com](http://natureartjournal.blogspot.com)

Mary Dominguez



Smith tailor class presentations to student needs.

Later in the session, icebreakers are part of the homework assignments and give students the opportunity to practice skills learned in class. A favorite assignment asks students to write a story and create a journal page based on the prompt, “If I were one inch tall, where would I go in the garden and what would I do?” At the start of the next class, students share their stories and journal pages. By shifting perspectives, students notice details in nature they might have otherwise missed; in class, they delight in hearing about the imaginary exploits of their Lilliputian peers.

Each eight-week session ends with a brief exhibition at the garden. The garden gets to share art inspired by its rich botanical collections with visitors, and students get to celebrate their artistic journey and creative works with the public. Students feel a sense of pride in seeing how their work can positively impact others. For the garden, these exhibitions have been the best recruitment tool for future “Nature Journaling: Botany Through Art” sessions.

In the 2019–20 season, the garden offered “Nature Journaling: Botany Through Art” three times. Each session was modified based on student evaluations from the previous session. A benefit of working with adults is that they are much more willing to share specific feedback than children.

For example, students in the first session shared that presentations from the professional teaching artist could be overwhelming to new artists. Reuter and Smith subsequently pared down the content to

be more accessible for beginners while also providing extra resources for those who wanted more challenges. Another set of comments noted that the plein air portion of class could be downright unpleasant on hot Florida days, especially if it was located far from the air-conditioned classroom where the rest of class took place. Consequently, during inclement weather, it made more sense to bring plant material into the classroom.

Just as critical as the drawing and painting portions of the class is the sense of routine, the emphasis on slowing down and observing, and the building of community. One student shared, “Since retirement, I had lost my sense of routine and purpose. This class gave me something to look forward to, week after week.” Another student said the class helped her cope while recovering from medical procedures.

Reuter and Smith saw the community blossom before their eyes as students independently organized meetups and luncheons after the session ended. Once strangers, students now had new friends who shared their creative interests and love of the natural world.

## Going Virtual

At the end of February 2020, the garden had just wrapped up the third session of “Nature Journaling: Botany Through Art.” Planning for future sessions was underway, but just two weeks after that last session’s culminating exhibition, the garden closed due to COVID-19 and ended in-person programming for the foreseeable future.



Teaching artist Elizabeth Smith demonstrates color mixing techniques using a document camera, a vital tool for hosting visual arts classes in a virtual setting.



Session participants take the last few minutes of class to discuss and critique each other's work.

Nature journaling alumni quickly banded together and, before the end of March 2020, started a private Facebook group so they could stay in touch, share their journaling projects, and support one another during this uncertain time. Reuter and Smith also joined the group, continuing to share creative prompts and helpful tips.

Seeing the positive impact nature journaling had on past students and the way these older adults used technology to fight social isolation spurred the garden to continue the program despite limitations caused by the ongoing pandemic. With support from Aroha Philanthropies, in summer 2020, the garden piloted a short virtual nature journaling program for past students. This short course became a full eight-week virtual program for new students in 2021.

The artistic curriculum of the virtual program remains largely the same as the in-person version, although the delivery methods have certainly changed. The summer pilot revealed a need to reduce the number of apps and accounts needed to participate, so now students just need a single Google account to access the program. Course content is hosted on Google Classroom, which also provides a space for a virtual discussion room. Reuter and Smith teach class live through the Google Meet video conference platform.

Individual class length needed to be trimmed as well, from three hours to 90 minutes. Removing the plein air portion was an easy decision since the act of nature journaling is largely a solo practice anyway. Instead, students are encouraged to discover nature

near them and paint, draw, and write on their own schedule. Reuter also provides free access to the garden for all students to visit independently.

What has not changed in the transition from an in-person to a virtual program is the intentional social engagement. Class still begins with icebreakers, including the “Birthday Bloom” and one-inch-tall prompt. Going into the pilot, Reuter and Smith weren’t confident that the icebreakers would translate to a virtual format, but students surprised them. The older adults who signed up for this class were hungry for social engagement even if it was through a screen. One student shared that she had recently lost her mother, but she found emotional relief through the process of nature journaling and her classmates’ support.

### Plans for the Future

As the limitations initially imposed by COVID-19 relax, the garden intends to keep teaching “Nature Journaling: Botany Through Art” virtually. Technology improved many aspects of the program. For example, in the virtual class the teaching artist uses a document camera to demonstrate techniques, giving students a bird’s-eye view of her actions. The in-person version of technique demonstrations saw students crowd around a table to watch the teaching artist, so it is easy to see why students preferred the virtual demonstrations to learn how to execute challenging techniques.

The virtual platform also lends itself well to guest appearances from past program alumni, who are

periodically invited to log on from wherever they are to answer questions from current students and offer constructive advice.

Although socializing works well virtually, it is still no replacement for the real thing. Reuter cannot wait to facilitate in-person meetups of current students and alumni in the garden this winter because “in person, it’s much easier to have spontaneous, organic discussions on creativity and work through challenges together. There’s no need to ‘unmute’ yourself.”

As for the students, they are eager to grow the creative aging community. One wrote as much in an exit survey: “It is my hope that others will be as fortunate as I have been with this opportunity to risk taking the class and then growing from it. You’re never too old to try something new!”

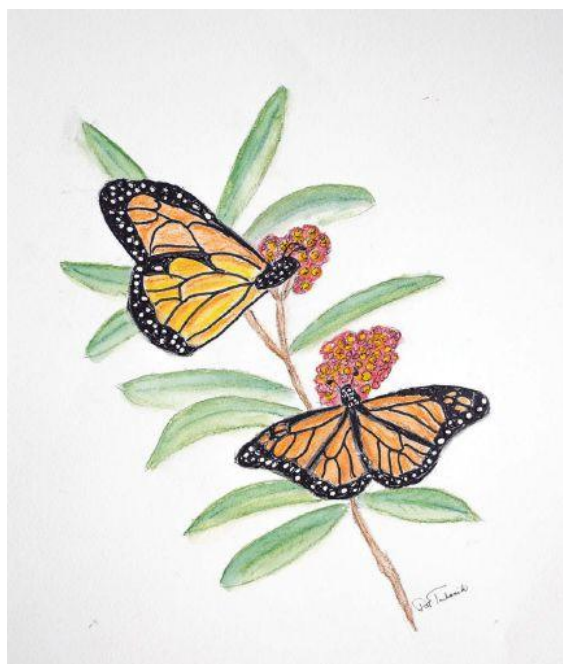
**Britt Patterson-Weber** is vice president of education & interpretation at Naples Botanical Garden in Florida.



One nature journaling participant was captivated by the tropical lobster claw (*Heliconia rostrata*) in the garden and chose the plant as a subject for their final piece.

## WHAT WE’VE LEARNED

- Make socialization and discussion as much of a priority as teaching the content.
- Supply each student with the same materials.
- Share examples of past students’ work to make the art form accessible to current students.
- Keep engaging alumni! They are a great resource for current students.
- For virtual programs:
  - Host a training on technology before class starts so students feel empowered on the first day.
  - Use document cameras, which are essential for any virtual program with a visual medium.
  - Record every class to share weekly. Recordings alleviate panic for those who may miss a class due to connectivity issues, doctors’ appointments, or unforeseen scheduling conflicts.



Nature journaling increases your observation skills and pushes you to see minor details, like butterflies pollinating milkweed at the garden.



Frances Cordell created *Fleur de Frances* as a part of the “Beading with the Big Chief” course at Louisiana State Museum.



# TEACHING TRADITIONS

The Louisiana State Museum engaged community culture bearers to lead classes in printmaking, drumming, and beading for older adults.

By Sara Lowenburg

## At the Louisiana State Museum

(LSM), a state-run system of nine historic sites and museums across Louisiana, students over the age of 55 have created poetry, learned printmaking, celebrated diverse New Orleans beats through drumming, and beaded with a Black Masking Indian chief. These courses, funded by Aroha Philanthropies, have varied in format and medium, but each has been rooted in Louisiana history and culture, highlighted the work of local creators and culture bearers, and helped build community within the class and the city at large.

Supporting the museum's mission to preserve and interpret Louisiana history and culture, these courses have strengthened connections with local audiences, built diverse communities of older adults, and created new interpretations of Louisiana history and culture through students' art.

## Sustaining the Culture

In spring 2019, LSM launched the series of courses for older adults with an eight-week printmaking class at the Cabildo, a national historic landmark located on Jackson Square in New Orleans. The site, built in

the 1790s under Spanish rule and now host to a variety of exhibitions highlighting the state's history and art, served as the perfect springboard for students' creations.

For example, students used the exhibition "We Love You, New Orleans," a celebration of the city's



food, architecture, amusements, nightlife, and more, as inspiration for their linoleum block prints, which were then displayed in a neighboring gallery at the culmination of the class. The students found personal connections in the museum exhibitions, such as memories of growing up in New Orleans or favorite forms of architecture, and wove those connections into their own art, creating a diverse tableau of prints celebrating the city.

Building upon the success of the printmaking course, the following two courses—drumming and beading—continued to prioritize connections to museum content and highlighted New Orleans traditions. Each was taught by a well-known culture bearer, a common term for the leaders, creators, and sustainers of culture. The museum had either previously worked with these culture bearers or was connected to them through its network of partners.

For the second series, the museum offered a drumming class in conjunction with "Drumville!: Evolution of the New Orleans Beat," currently on display at the New Orleans Jazz Museum at the Old U.S. Mint, another museum located in the French

Above: Students in the "Beading with the Big Chief" course work on their beaded designs. At right: "Congo Square: Drumming for Life" students at the culmination of their visit to Congo Square.



Quarter. Throughout this nine-week course, the students explored the rich influences of New Orleans music, including African rhythms such as Funga and bamboula, Caribbean rhythms, and the New Orleans second line beat so often heard in the city today. In week seven, the class met off-site in Congo Square, a significant public space about 10 blocks from the museum. From the mid-18th through the mid-19th century, enslaved people and free people of color would meet at Congo Square on Sundays to sing, dance, drum, and sell goods.

The teaching artist, Luther Gray, is the co-founder of the Congo Square Preservation Society, founder of the percussion group Bamboula 2000, and a drum maker. He leads drumming in Congo Square every Sunday, continuing a centuries-long tradition. Gray wove storytelling and history into each new lesson, creating a communal space for students to share their own stories and build meaningful connections with the art form and its community. Many of the students have continued drumming after the class and often attend the Sunday drum circles.

Several of the drumming students also signed up for the third series in winter 2020, a beading course in the style of Black Masking Indians, also known as Mardi Gras Indians, taught by Big Chief Darryl Montana of the Yellow Pocahontas Black Masking tribe.

Black Masking Indians have been a distinct part of New Orleans culture for well over a century, influenced by Native American, African, and Caribbean traditions. These culture bearers spend the full year making a hand-sewn suit of beads and feathers, with a new suit debuted each year on Mardi Gras day. Chief Montana is a fourth-generation Black Masking Indian who has been masking for nearly 50 years, and he is the son of Allison “Tootie” Montana, a cultural leader who’s credited with transforming the practice.

Throughout the eight-week course, students learned the techniques and artistry behind the craft, hand sewing their own designs out of beads, sequins, and pearls. They explored the differences between the pictorial, two-dimensional “Uptown” style and three-dimensional “Downtown” designs, using them as inspiration for their own canvases.

Much like Luther Gray, Chief Montana infused storytelling and song into each class, bringing the culture and history to life and building a shared appreciation among students. Each class session, for example, started and ended with singing “Indian Red,” a song that is integral to the tradition.

One of the students, Warren, commented that while he was nervous about diving into a new art form, he thought it would be a great way to get a closer look at the culture as someone not native to New Orleans. His piece, a fleur-de-lis made from

## HOW TO DEVELOP CULTURALLY CONNECTED PROGRAMMING

**Hire teaching artists rooted in the cultural community.** Their expertise and passion will inspire more meaningful experiences for students and help them connect with preexisting communities, cultural traditions, and heritage outside the museum.

**Weave in connections to the museum’s collections and exhibitions.** Each course included a visit, whether virtual or in person, to the museum’s exhibitions, where the teaching artists shared inspiration, highlighted artistry, and encouraged closer looking. As a result, each class was meaningfully connected to the museum and the wider landscape, and students created works that reflected this sense of place.

**Conduct thoughtful outreach to develop diverse student groups.** By reaching out to organizations outside of LSM’s typical network, the museum successfully cultivated classes of students with diverse skill levels, interests, and backgrounds, and their diversity of experience has greatly enriched the courses. Students heard about the classes through senior centers, multiple museums’ docent programs, flyers at local community centers, social media, and even the listserv of a Mardi Gras krewe.

banana leaves, celebrated his personal connections to both New Orleans and Puerto Rico. Warren found the class to be both joyous and meditative. The process pulled him in, and the hours slipped by. Even more, he said, “watching what other people did from nothing was fascinating.”

### Making Connections

Each of these courses served a diverse group of students, building connections and community among New Orleanians who may not have otherwise crossed paths. To recruit students, the museum reached out to docent programs at museums around the city, local community centers, senior centers, and even Mardi Gras krewes.

Through the classes, students found new opportunities to connect with each other and the museum, and many students returned for more than one series, eager to try out new art forms. Lee, one of the participants in all three in-person classes, remarked in an email, “The Cabildo, the Mint, and Congo Square—landmarks I’ve known my whole life—have never felt so alive and vibrant. I now see, feel, and appreciate them with a much greater depth.”

These connections to local history and culture reach far beyond the physical spaces, though. Through these courses, the museum was able to connect students to some of the vibrant cultural communities of New Orleans. Just as many students have continued drumming, others have continued creating beadwork and maintained connections with one another and the teaching artists.

Chief Montana even invited one student, Mr. Raymond, a 90-year-old lifelong New Orleanian, to mask with the tribe for Mardi Gras. Though these plans were postponed due to COVID-19, they have since been in touch and are planning for the coming year. Through their connection, Chief Montana also took part in the reopening celebration of PACE, the senior day program through which Mr. Raymond and other students have found the museum classes.

### Moving Online

When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, it drastically reshaped the museum’s offerings, including these courses for older adults. Although students could

no longer meet in person, the museum was able to shift quickly to virtual courses through continued funding and guidance from Aroha Philanthropies and Lifetime Arts.

These online courses began in summer 2020 with two four-week-long poetry courses, which met entirely over Zoom. Even in this virtual setting, the courses followed the same guiding principles of being grounded in the museum content, exploring Louisiana culture and history, and providing a space for community and growth.

For example, teaching artist Elizabeth Gross, a local poet and professor, designed the course around poets with connections to Louisiana. Students read works exploring local history and environmental issues and created their own works, many of which reflected these local connections.

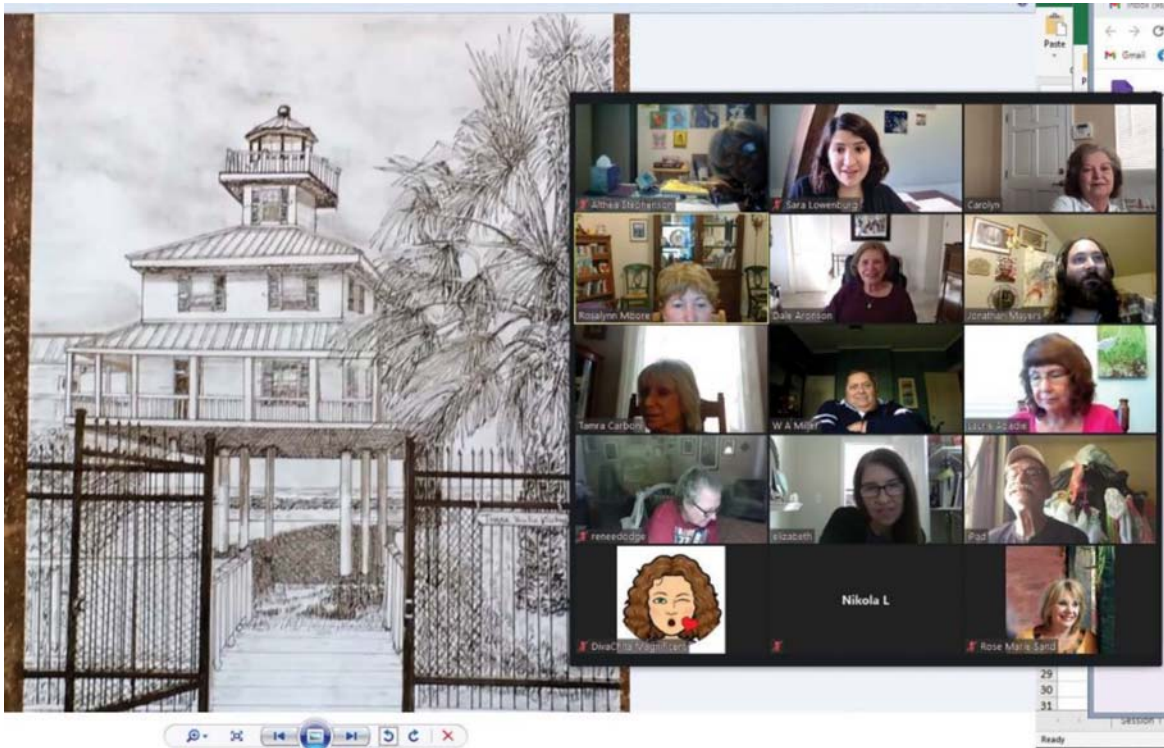
The virtual courses continued with an eight-week drawing class, again rooted in the Louisiana landscape, focusing on New Orleans architecture and students’ own homes. The class learned basic techniques using various drawing tools and practiced with historical photos from the museum’s collection. The teaching artist, Jonathan Mayers, is a visual artist and language activist for Kouri-Vini, the endangered Creole language of Louisiana. He brought this understanding into his teaching, inspiring a love of and closer connection with Louisiana landscapes.

For their final pieces, students created drawings of their own homes or neighborhoods. This required active looking as they explored the context and history behind the spaces and shared stories of how they came to live there. In the midst of the pandemic, the course gave students an opportunity to reflect on their sense of place, and as a collective, they created a tableau that spoke to this unique moment. After the class, many of the students have remained in touch with Mayers and other students as they create artwork for themselves, friends, and family.

### Now and in the Future

The museum continues to offer these courses for adults ages 55 and older, with additional in-person beading and drumming courses planned for 2021, and given the success of the virtual classes, LSM expects to offer more online courses in the future.





The success of the courses has inspired even more programming beyond the grant. The museum is particularly focusing on opportunities for long-term engagement and culturally connected creative experiences.

In winter 2020, LSM partnered with Southern Rep Theatre’s Care for Creatives program on a free six-week workshop for older adults in the LGBTQ+ community. The program, designed to foster social connection through art making, used the museum’s exhibition “Grand Illusions: The History and Artistry of Gay Carnival in New Orleans” as its anchor and inspiration.

In spring 2021, LSM offered a free virtual six-week course in African dance and Black Masking traditions for students of all ages in connection with the exhibition “Mystery in Motion: African American Masking and Spirituality in Mardi Gras.” Similar to previous courses, the teaching artists led students in song, storytelling, and dance focusing on New Orleans culture and history. For the culminating event, the class came together in person to celebrate with an afternoon of dancing and drumming in Congo Square.

The Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums grant through Aroha Philanthropies has allowed the museum to serve as a forum for creativity and community building. Through these courses, LSM has expanded its audiences, strengthened local



Above: Students in the “Drawing Home” virtual course view and discuss a work in progress, *New Basin Canal Lighthouse* by Dale Aronson. At left: Jeannette Shaw created *Carnival Gown Flower* as a part of the “Beading with the Big Chief” course.

connections, and served as a platform to uplift and support culture bearers and their work. These priorities will continue to inform and inspire museum programming for audiences of all ages.

**Sara Lowenburg** is the manager of education at the Louisiana State Museum.

Logo B+



The  
Queer  
Perspective

An intergenerational LGBTQIA+ arts program at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson is setting a gold standard.

By Eli Burke

**“Stay Gold,” a creative aging program** at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Tucson, invites members of the LGBTQIA+ community into the museum space to create and consume contemporary art to make relevant connections between museum exhibitions and their lives.

Through dialogue, gallery activities, and art making, the program offers opportunities for skill building, cultivates empathy, provides connection, and expands our community. Members of “Stay Gold” have learned printmaking techniques, built pocket shrines, created soul paintings, made zines, and interrogated our generational differences through dialogue. We share our stories, unpack our difficult histories, and celebrate and grieve together.

“Stay Gold” began in 2017, but it has grown since 2018, when MOCA Tucson was invited to apply for a grant from Aroha Philanthropies to engage and serve those 55 and older through its Seeding Vitality Arts initiative. Although it was an intergenerational program aimed at serving the LGBTQIA+ community, we

Ben Zorro Griffith holds up artwork made during the “Stay Gold” program, inspired by the work of rafa esparza.



thought that “Stay Gold” would be a good candidate for the funding, which would allow us to more intentionally and thoughtfully serve our 55+ participants.

### How It Started

“Stay Gold” was created as a part of the curriculum in a graduate seminar course, “Issues and Recent Research in Contemporary Visual Culture Education,” taught by Dr. Carissa DiCindio at the University of Arizona. Dr. DiCindio challenged our class to create a three-session program that connected to “Mapping Q,” a program at the University of Arizona Museum of Art (UAMA) developed by Chelsea Farrar that helps LGBTQ+ youth explore art making, self-care, and harm reduction. Mapping Q operates in partnership with Arizona’s Life Links for Youth (ALLY), which focuses on reducing the rate of attempted and completed suicides among Arizona’s youth through peer leadership development.

In addition to identifying as LGBTQIA+ myself, MOCA Tucson had collaborated with UAMA and “Mapping Q” before, so I was familiar with the program and many of the participants. Also, I had been a teaching artist with “The Latona Project,” which sought to encourage LGBTQI seniors to understand one another and their unique, underserved identities in art museums via tailored guest lectures, art tours, and art making at UAMA.

I shared my experience with both of these programs with my peers in the seminar course, and the class collectively decided that an intergenerational LGBTQIA+ program would be an excellent way to extend the ideas introduced by “Mapping Q.” As we researched other museum programs, we found there were almost none that specifically served this community.

With inspiration from the film and book *The Outsiders* as well as the Robert Frost poem *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, we decided to call the program “Stay Gold” to reflect the idea of time, aging, innocence, beauty, and self-reflection.

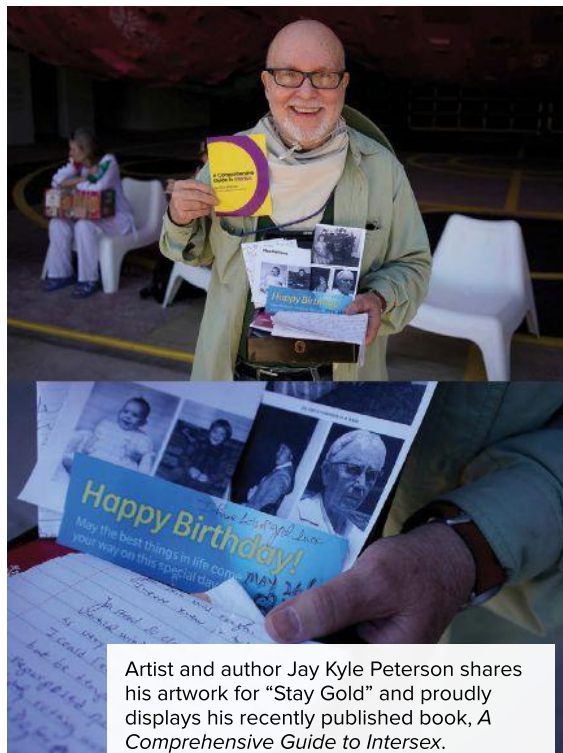
### Program Goals and Structure

With “Stay Gold” we wanted to have a space for the LGBTQIA+ community to connect with one another, learn, and heal. During the first program, I felt the

instant relief of being in a classroom with only other LGBTQIA+ people. It was as if a weight was lifted and I could focus on learning rather than trying to navigate this usually heteronormative environment as a queer/trans person. I had never acknowledged how heavy that weight was until it was removed, and I believe it is a critical element of the program.

Through support from Aroha and Lifetime Arts, we learned that 55+ learners have unique needs. Older people are often seeking affirming spaces, new social networks, and a new sense of purpose in an effort to stave off loneliness and isolation and remain engaged with the world. This prompted us to shift to a sequential skill-building format, challenging participants to engage in one longer project throughout the program, allowing for a scaffolded learning experience that would end with a final piece of art that participants could feel proud of. We also incorporated a showcase event at the end of each session where participants could invite friends and family to experience and celebrate the work they created.

“Stay Gold” is offered in the spring and fall in 10-week sessions. The weekly two-hour classes are held in the museum’s education space, and the museum provides all supplies, snacks, and transportation vouchers to remove as many barriers to access as



Artist and author Jay Kyle Peterson shares his artwork for “Stay Gold” and proudly displays his recently published book, *A Comprehensive Guide to Intersex*.

possible. We usually have 15–20 participants, with a core group of six to seven who return every season and new people joining us each session. The program includes an art-making studio component, demos of new techniques, intergenerational dialogue, and gallery activities.

No two “Stay Gold” seasons are the same. There is always a different mix of people in the room, and

## WHAT WE’VE LEARNED

**Listen.** When creating a program like this, listening is key. Be willing to let go of power and what has been before. Your community knows what it needs.

**Decenter.** Decenter your own experience and what museums are “supposed to do.” Allow for the lived experiences of others to guide the design of your program, even, and especially, when it may seem unconventional.

**Collaborate.** Collaboration makes us all stronger. It allows us to expand our audiences as well as our social and professional networks. It can also offer new ways of viewing and approaching your collections and/or mission as an organization.

**Adapt.** Needs change. Be willing to adapt as the group changes. Remain open to shifts in program structure, curriculum, and outcomes.

**Evolve.** Think about your program as a living, breathing thing, because it is. Museums are the people who run, support, and visit them. Be willing to grow and change along with the program as you learn as an educator, administrator, or participant. Scaffold what you have learned, but also be willing to “unlearn” so that you can create something from a multi-vocal and collective space. When in doubt, reread your organization’s mission statement. This is your “true north” and should always inform your program development.

the participants guide the experience. The program is “queer” in that way. It pushes the boundaries of what we consider the “norm” in museum education. As soon as it is defined, it changes.

“I honestly just loved meeting everyone and how truly intergenerational the experience was,” wrote one participant in a program assessment. “I said this on a Zoom, but intergenerational (queer!) connection was something I didn’t know I needed but it felt so impactful and important.”

Another shared, “I’m so grateful that there’s funding for this program. I can just see how special and impactful it is, and I’m just so grateful to be part of this community and that it can essentially be accessible to so many people.”

“Stay Gold” is meant to challenge traditional museum education models. It “queers” colonized spaces. It seeks to be as nonhierarchical as possible, negotiating power between all parties, rather than exercising power over the group from the top down. It is collaborative, multi-vocal, and always evolving with the group.

Our participants often become facilitators of subsequent sessions, and their personal experience and skills guide the program. We revisit the conceptual program focus and logistics at the end of each season and make changes when necessary. I work with facilitators to mediate and assist with curriculum that aligns with our exhibitions.

For example, during our 2018 exhibition “Blessed Be: Mysticism, Spirituality, and the Occult in Contemporary Art,” group members explored their relationship to religion and spirituality, and one participant offered to lead a session on “soul painting.” We also made pocket shrines and clay vessels. Our exhibition “Dazzled: OMD, Memphis Design and Beyond,” which highlights the black-and-white camouflage used on World War I warships to disorient the enemy, allowed us to shine a light on the ways we have used camouflage, or “code-switching,” to protect ourselves in different public or social settings, especially when occupying space within any type of institution.

I think of “Stay Gold” as a constellation of bodies who are all affected by one another. We consciously attend to these relationships, addressing the rippling effects our experiences can have on one another, using art as the vehicle for dialogue. While echoes of the institution will always reverberate through our program structures, flattening hierarchies of power can help minimize the negative impacts colonization and oppression have had on our most vulnerable communities.

### A Constant Evolution

Since receiving funding from Aroha, we have run the program an additional nine times, with each program teaching us something different about how to best attend to our community.

## RESOURCES

Eli Burke, “Digital Gold: Queering Flat Spaces,” American Alliance of Museums, July 20, 2020  
[aam-us.org/2020/07/20/digital-gold-queering-flat-spaces/](https://aam-us.org/2020/07/20/digital-gold-queering-flat-spaces/)

Eli Burke, “Intuition and Vulnerability: A Queer Approach to Museum Education,” *Journal of Museum Education*, 45(4), 2020

Eli Burke and Carissa DiCindio, “Staying Gold: How a Group of University Students Created Intergenerational Connections Through Art Museum Programming and Community Collaboration,” *International Journal of Lifelong Learning in Art Education*, 2019  
[scholarscompass.vcu.edu/ijllae/vol2/iss1/7](https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/ijllae/vol2/iss1/7)

Eli Burke, Harrison Orr, and Carissa DiCindio, “Queering Community Through Intergenerational Arts Experiences in the Museum,” Medium, September 11, 2020  
[bit.ly/3wJ4SxH](https://bit.ly/3wJ4SxH)

Eli Burke, Harrison Orr, and Carissa DiCindio, “Stay Gold: An Intergenerational LGBTQIA+ Arts Program,” in *Engaging Communities Through Civic Engagement in Art Museum Education* (edited by Bryna Bobick and Carissa DiCindio), 2021

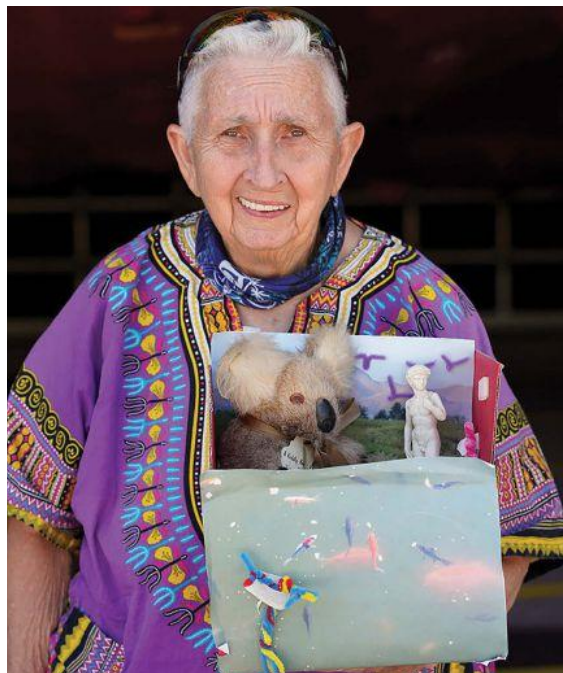
Just as not all people 55 and over have the same needs, neither do all LGBTQIA+ people, as illustrated by the generational differences unpacked during the program. Through thoughtful dialogue prompted by the work of different contemporary artists, the group can discuss their various experiences, cultivate an atmosphere of mutual respect, and acknowledge differences, which when not attended to can inadvertently pass on generational trauma and misconceptions.

For example, during our conversations on gender it was clear that older participants felt disconnected from younger generations and left out of the conversation. Once we were able to share our individual perspectives, older participants understood that younger participants were grateful for the work previous generations did to cultivate a world where they could openly live as themselves. Older participants could then see that the gender shifts occurring were building on previous work rather than rejecting it.

One artist we looked at in our virtual sessions was Zanele Muholi, a South African photographer who uses photography to provide a platform for LGBTQIA+ people to control their own narratives and choose how they want to be represented in the world. I created a prompt that challenged participants to create their own work that illustrated how they want to be represented in the world, and then we discussed each participant's art. Ultimately, this illustrated how we all approach queerness in our own personal ways. It allowed us to cultivate empathy among and between members of the group.

Contemporary art, as a direct record of lived truths, provides context and relevance for members of "Stay Gold." It allows us to interrogate the past from a queer perspective. It also allows for a wider range of expression, which can include mediums that fall outside of the traditional painting, print, and sculpture canon. It decenters one central way of consuming information and expressing ideas. It recognizes and celebrates other cultures or individual queer experiences and ways of making, which are just as valid as what western art has deemed historically "correct."

The success of "Stay Gold" has inspired the museum to create other programs for older adults and LGBTQIA+ populations. For example, the museum ran an arts program at a local senior center that



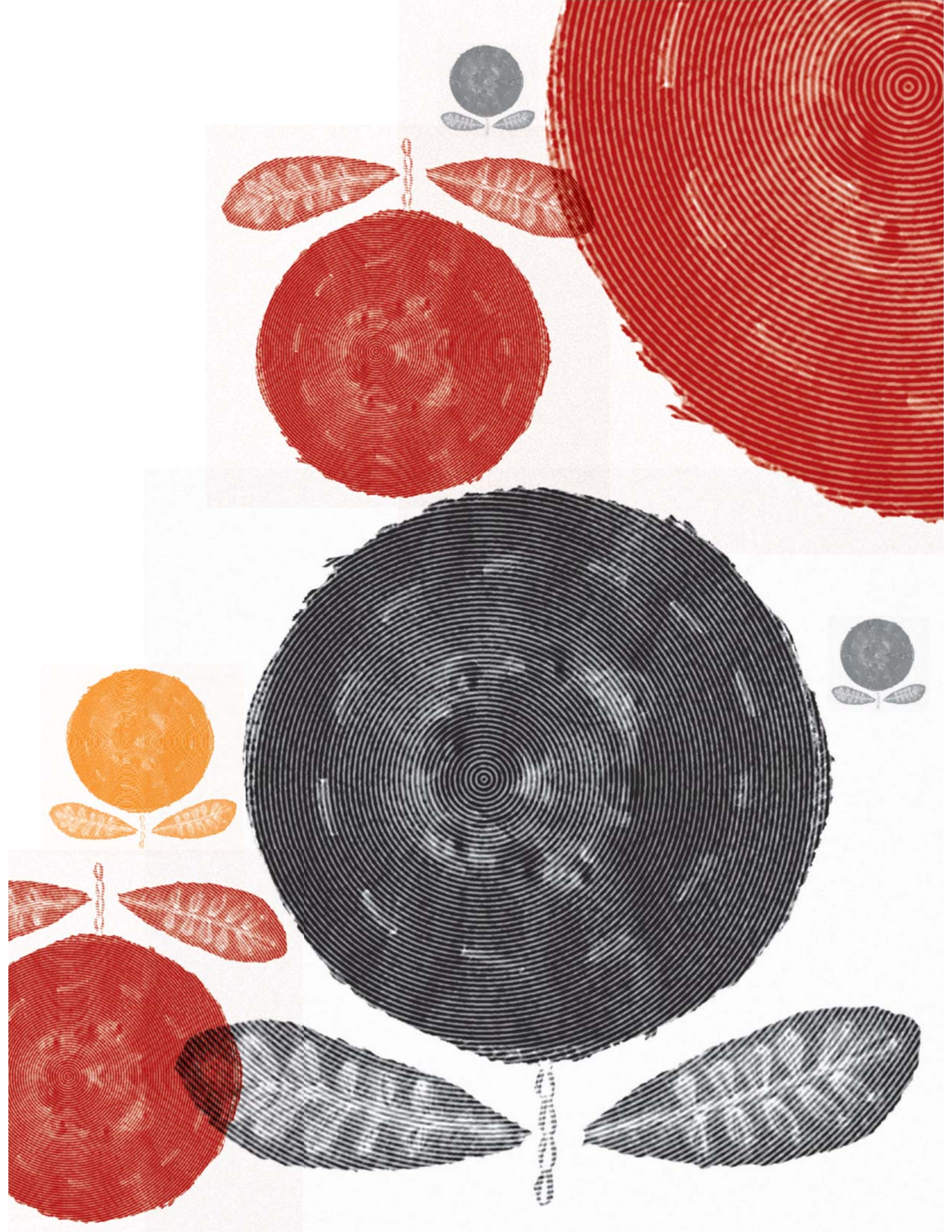
Stets shares her artwork during the "Stay Gold" showcase event held on the plaza at MOCA Tucson.

served the general 55+ population. Unfortunately, this program ultimately highlighted the major blind spots in our government agencies with respect to inclusivity and a dedication to serve *all* members of our 55+ community equitably.

On a brighter note, we recently invited our "Stay Gold" participants to the showcase for a program the museum runs called "School of Drag," which focuses on the art of gender performance and drag. After the showcase event, several 55+ members of "Stay Gold" were interested in participating. With consensus from the youth in "School of Drag," we have made the program intergenerational.

My hope is that others in the museum field will be inspired to create programs that attend to not only specific communities, but the unique individual needs of those in their programs. Through multi-vocal, learner-centered programs, we can examine how museums can best do this work.

**Eli Burke** was education director at MOCA Tucson until July 2021. He is now developing programs around and teaching human-centered design at the University of Arizona, where he is also a Ph.D. candidate in art and visual culture education.







# Essential Programming

The Anchorage Museum’s “Vital & Creative” programs helped older adults engage in creative pursuits both in person and online.

By Molissa Udevitz



**The balance between personal** vitality and overall well-being is particularly difficult for individuals aging in Alaska. Limited assisted living facilities force many older adults to age in place out of necessity, and they are often isolated from traditional support networks as younger family members leave the state. These factors, along with the northern climate and high cost of health care, make engaging in creative pursuits and other healthy activities challenging for older adults.

Such activities are particularly needed in Alaska. According to the Alaska Commission on Aging’s 2019/2020 Senior Snapshot, the state had the fastest growing senior population per capita for the ninth consecutive year, with about 19.5 percent of Alaska’s population over the age of 60.

So in spring 2019, with support from Aroha Philanthropies, the Anchorage Museum launched “Vital & Creative,” eight-week sequential art workshops for adults 55 and older. The museum’s

interdisciplinary nature allowed for the first three series to focus on textile arts, movement, and book arts. Each program brought knowledge from Northern traditions, art, and cultural objects to life with the expertise of local community artists, culture bearers, and the participants themselves.

### A Collaborative Effort

The Anchorage Museum drew upon previous connections to hire experienced teaching artists. These instructors were instrumental in developing and leading every workshop series, meeting our objectives to engage participants in art making and help them make social connections. The museum also sought to offer multiple perspectives in examining the complex, dynamic contexts of each art form. To add this depth, we incorporated museum objects and brought in additional guest artists throughout the classes.

For example, the textile arts class learned about Indigenous practices for preparing and sewing moose hides from Ahtna and Paiute artist Melissa Shaginoff, and participants examined a moose hide jacket from the museum collection with her. In the movement class, Yup'ik artist Michelle Snyder selected dance fans from the museum collection to share with participants and then taught everyone a Yup'ik dance. Guest musicians, including Anchorage Symphony Orchestra percussionist Corliss Kimmel, provided joyful musical accompaniment for several movement class sessions.

Additionally, museum collections staff shared several museum objects not on public view that related to the workshop themes, including original sketches of the Iñupiaq Wolf Dance circa 1900 and contemporary artist books. Collections staff also provided valuable context, such as acquisition history and caretaking information.

The guest artists and museum collections staff helped participants see textiles, movement, and book arts through different lenses and form personal connections to museum objects. They also were able to interact with audiences they did not usually engage. Guest artists also appreciated being financially compensated for sharing their knowledge and skills.

### A Range of Outcomes

While the Anchorage Museum expected participants would enjoy these workshops, we did not anticipate just how impactful they would be. Participants ranged in age, mobility, dexterity, and previous art experience, but all demonstrated creative personal

growth over each eight-week series. Participants built confidence, overcame preconceptions about their lack of creativity, and engaged in deep personal reflection.

Textile arts participants created wall hangings that expressed touching personal stories. One participant shared that

she “was surprised...that the theme [emerged] about childhood memories and my Granny.” Although hesitant at first, participants in the movement class became comfortable making personal movement choices. They connected with each other while doing structured movement improvisation in an art gallery. Book arts students made personal artist books with themes that included family, hometowns, landscapes, and cats.

Interest in these free “Vital & Creative” classes far exceeded the 18 available spots, but we also welcomed many repeat participants. These individuals felt comfortable trying an unfamiliar art form—like movement—because they trusted museum staff to create a welcoming environment and stimulating class. However, we reached a limited group of older adults, many of whom were already connected to the museum as members or volunteers.



Participants practice making paper pop-ups in the in-person Book Arts class.

To expand the participant group, we created a new older adult mailing list where we shared “Vital & Creative” information. This mailing list started after our broad marketing efforts for the first series led to more interest than class space. We also partnered with two assisted living centers to engage new individuals and offer them the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships

outside of their residential facilities. One resident was an inspiration to all when she celebrated her 90th birthday during the movement workshop.

These are first steps toward welcoming a wider range of individuals, but we recognize we can still be more inclusive by addressing transportation and language barriers as well as dispelling misconceptions that these classes are only for existing museum lovers.

These workshops also led to some unexpected opportunities for the museum as the community started associating us with creative aging programming and expertise. A museum staff member served on the board of the nonprofit Older Persons Action Group, the Anchorage Senior Activities Center invited the museum to lead one of its monthly “Age Smart” talks, and the museum led a “Landscapes of Alaska” virtual program series for AARP members.

### Pivoting to Virtual

When COVID-19 suspended in-person programs, the Anchorage Museum joined other museums and cultural institutions in pivoting to virtual program delivery. This included programs for older adults who were especially vulnerable to isolation during pandemic lockdowns.

In our first foray into virtual programs for this demographic, we adapted our in-person movement series. This four-week summer series provided opportunities for physical activity at a time when many individuals were unable to



An example of “snail mail” art made by one participant and sent to another participant as part of the virtual Book Arts class.

leave their homes or attend group fitness classes. One person shared that “after just the first class, I felt happy, which is a good thing to be feeling these days.” Another participant recovering from COVID-19 said, “This class has been perfect

to gradually regain strength and confidence in my body...I am healing and getting my body back.”

These classes also created new opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration as education, exhibitions, and information technology staff worked together in new ways.

The success of the pilot series paved the way for three more “Vital & Creative” virtual workshop series, which took place from fall 2020 into spring 2021. Each series was seven weeks but alternated between 90-minute synchronous classes and asynchronous activities on the “off” weeks. This model sought to reduce screen fatigue and allow for further creative engagement that did not fit into the live class time.

Our virtual series expanded upon our in-person workshops. In virtual book arts, participants created individual artist books showcasing personal object collections. In a virtual movement series, participants learned about, tried, and wrote sets of instructions—or scores—to inspire movements that were then

## RESOURCES

The Creative Aging Resource  
[creativeagingresource.org](https://creativeagingresource.org)

Aroha Philanthropies Vitality Arts resources  
[arohaphilanthropies.org/resources](https://arohaphilanthropies.org/resources)

Dance On Online Festival creative aging resources  
[danceexchange.org/dance-on-festival-resource-room](https://danceexchange.org/dance-on-festival-resource-room)

performed in small groups over Zoom. The final series was a virtual writing class where participants were introduced to different poem and short story structures to inspire the retelling of personal stories.

We supplemented these classes with a digital platform where we posted activity prompts, resources, and upcoming virtual events related to the class. This class-specific platform allowed participants to interact with each other and the art form outside of structured class time. The platform also allowed us to showcase more Anchorage Museum objects, through links to object photos, videos, and virtual exhibitions, than

The virtual writing class took this a step further: participants were organized into small writing pods where they shared their work and received feedback from each other. One pod even met in person—with sensitivity to COVID-19 protocols—and planned to continue meeting to discuss their writings after the class ended.

We were pleasantly surprised at how the digital platform, asynchronous prompts, and mail partners gave participants greater agency over how they engaged in the class. Participants had multiple ways to share their work and a space to continue conversations that were cut short due to limited class time.

The pandemic-initiated pivot to virtual programs demonstrated how the museum can support our communities by not only considering our program audience but also our instructors. All our teaching artists expressed profound gratitude for these opportunities, especially at a time of pandemic-related financial and emotional stress. Teaching artists were also grateful for the museum staff who managed the technical and logistical aspects, easing their transition to virtual teaching and empowering them to teach virtually in the future. The instructors also looked forward to each class and even participated in the mail exchanges. Participants appreciated the teaching artists and gave them high praise in survey responses. Several mentioned how one teaching artist “brought cultural awareness” to the class, demonstrating the value of employing teaching artists with different backgrounds and skills.

We limited our virtual classes to 20 or fewer participants to allow for deeper personal connections. Individuals who had not previously participated in the “Vital & Creative” series joined the virtual classes, including some outside the Anchorage area. However, this expanded audience only included individuals with internet access and basic digital literacy—something many older adults in the region do not have.

### Challenging Questions Remain

Whether in person or virtual, the Anchorage Museum saw the profound benefits of “Vital & Creative” programs for both participants and facilitators. The museum is recommitting to strengthening the partnerships with local organizations that serve

could be viewed during in-person classes. Participants enjoyed using the platform to share their work and comment on each other’s posts.

We also fostered social engagement through a “snail mail” exchange in which we matched participants with someone else in the group and included stamped notecards in their provided material kits so they could easily send each other mail. On asynchronous weeks, we posted mail prompts related to the class theme on the digital platform. For example, a mail prompt from the book arts series asked participants to draw or write about an object from their personal collection. Participants shared photos or descriptions of the mail they received both in class and on the digital platform.

In the in-person textile class, Ahtna and Paiute artist Melissa Shaginoff taught participants to sew on pig intestine (the white circle) to simulate sewing marine mammal intestines, a material used in several Alaska Native cultures for its waterproof qualities.



## TIPS FOR VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

**Establish a facilitator team.** If possible, divide responsibilities (such as technology troubleshooting, participant communication, and curriculum) among multiple staff members and have multiple staff members present at each virtual program.

**Front-load logistical details about what to expect.** When initially communicating with participants, include information about the class structure, ways to participate, technology how-tos, and who to contact with questions.

**Keep materials simple.** Mail any necessary supplies to participants in advance or arrange a pick-up location.

**Do a test run (or two!).** Practice the virtual program before the first class to make sure everyone, including the teaching artist and participants, are comfortable with the virtual platform.

**Have an asynchronous digital platform.** This allows participants to communicate and stay engaged between synchronous classes as well as share additional resources. The Anchorage Museum used Google Classroom and MeWe.

**Get creative with screenless activities.** In addition to the art-making activities, the Anchorage Museum paired participants with a “snail mail partner” and provided prompts related to the course content and materials that participants used to send each other mail.

**Incorporate the collection.** Virtual programs present opportunities to showcase objects that cannot be viewed in person. The Anchorage Museum used a combination of photos and videos of its collection for these classes.

older adults so these types of programs can continue even if dedicated funds are no longer available.

However, as we look to future creative aging programs, we are considering the following complicated questions about diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in these programs—and we hope other institutions will join us in thinking about such adjustments to their practices.


How can we reach older individuals who are not already actively involved in our museum? What barriers do we remove to reach new older adult audiences? How do we equitably and sustainably balance our new virtual experiences with in-person programming?

These questions also extend to the teaching artists. Why do we hire certain teaching artists? How can we expand our networks to include other teaching artists? How can teaching artists help us work with communities whose culture or language has previously excluded them from museum programs?

Partnerships with other organizations can introduce programming to new participants and teaching artists. We partnered with two different assisted living facilities, which allowed our “Vital & Creative” programs to reach older adults who would not have otherwise participated. However, these relationships lapsed due to staff turnover at the assisted living facilities.

This demonstrated the importance of having higher-level institutional support in any partnership. Creating such partnerships takes time and requires a long-range view, which leads to another series of questions about the sustainability of these programs: Will museum boards and leaders support the time it takes to build genuine community partnerships? Once these partnerships are established, how will institutions help sustain them? What happens when grant funding is not available?

Both research and anecdotal evidence support the benefits of creative aging programs, and museums are essential in providing these types of experiences. Museums should be proud of this work, but we also need to seriously reflect on how these programs can reach older adults who are not already museum advocates. Let us consider these difficult questions together and work to make our creative aging programming more inclusive of our local communities.

 **Molissa Udevitz** is an educator at the Anchorage Museum in Alaska where she develops and leads a variety of interdisciplinary programs for youth and the public.



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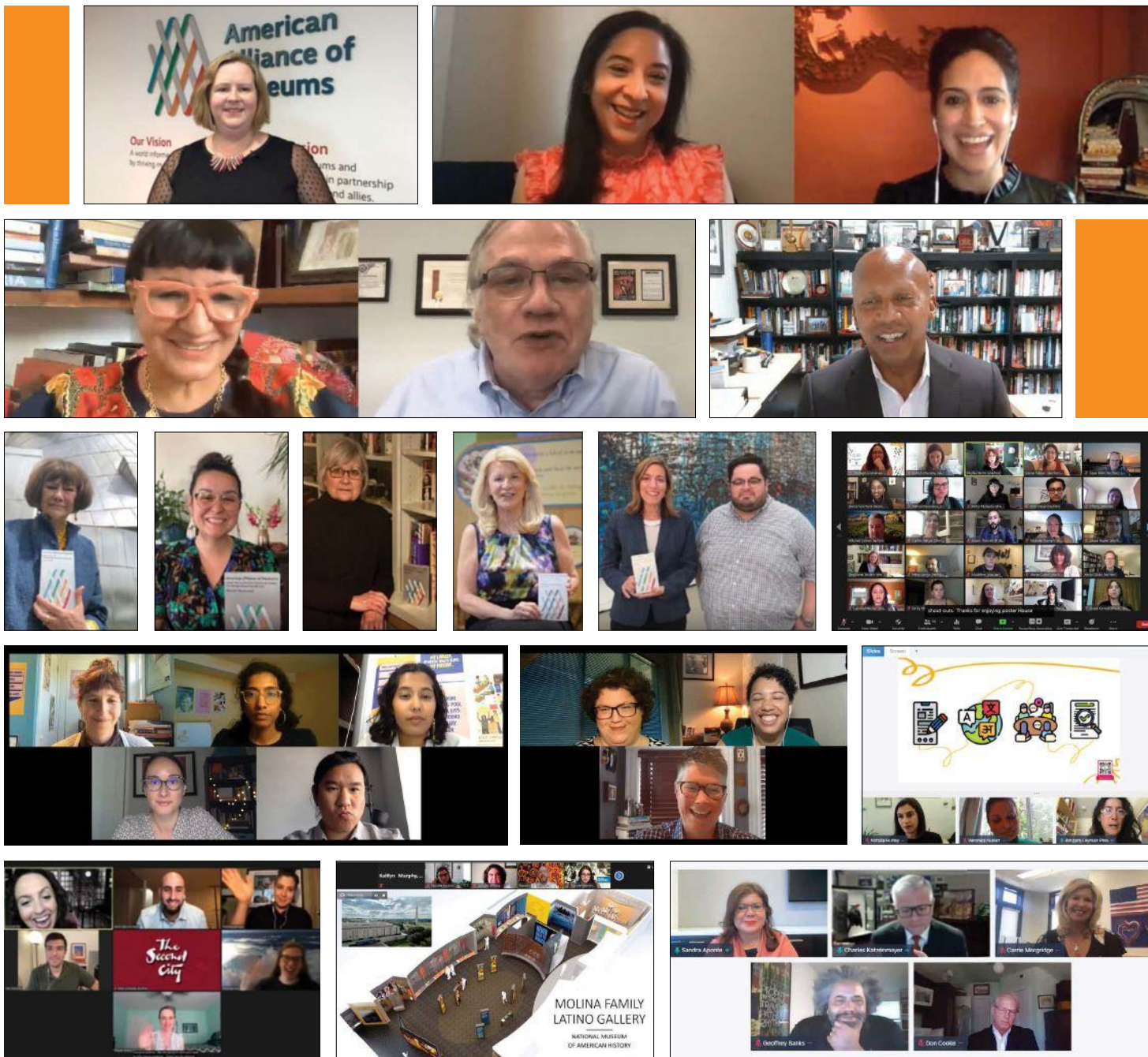
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**(Row 1, left to right):** [1] “The Truth Must Start with Museums” - **Laura Lott**, AAM’s President and CEO provides opening remarks to thousands of #AAM2021 attendees (full remarks at [aam-us.org/opening](https://aam-us.org/opening)) [2 & 3] Keynote speaker **Priya Parker** (right) kicks off #AAM2021, joined in conversation by **Julissa Marengo** of the Smithsonian.

**(Row 2, left to right):** [1 & 2] Acclaimed Chicana author **Sandra Cisneros** (left) takes attendees on a storytelling adventure of museums’ role in her life, joined by **Carlos Tortolero** (right) of the National Museum of Mexican Art. [3] **Bryan Stevenson** opened with a keynote on June 7, emphasizing the role museums must play in truth, justice, and reconciliation.

**(Row 3, left to right):** Awards were announced for exemplary work in the museum field: [1] **Dr. Lyndel King**, Award for Distinguished Service to Museums; [2] **Brandie Macdonald**, Nancy Hanks Award for Professional Excellence; [3] **Janice Majewski**, Award for DEAL for Individuals; [4] **Marilee Jennings** accepts the Award for DEAL for Institutions for the Children’s Discovery Museum of San Jose; [5] **George Luna-Peña** and **Stacy Liberman** accept the Award for DEAL in Programs for the The Broad’s Diversity Apprenticeship Program. [6] Attendees enjoying the National Emerging Museum Professionals reception.

**(Row 3, left to right):** Speakers in sessions: [1] “One Neighborhood at a Time: Sharing Stories to Build Inclusive Cities” - **Maggie Hutcheson**, **Brannavy Jeyasundaram**,

**Brian Joe**, **Nipuni Kuruppu**, and **Irina D. Mihalache**. [2] “Year of Reckoning: Moving Your Organization Toward an Antiracist Future” - **Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko**, **Dina Bailey**, **Michelle Grohe**, and **Joaquin Ortiz**. [3] “Processes and Methodologies for Creating Bilingual Exhibitions” - **Amparo Leyman Pino**, **Veronika Nunez**, and **Vicki Wawerchak**.

**(Row 4, left to right):** [1] Chicago-based comedy troupe **The Second City** entertaining #AAM2021 attendees. [2] A model rendering shown in the AAM Latino Network meet-up of the Molina Family Latino Gallery opening next year at the Smithsonian. [3] Speakers in an Elevate Stage session, “Resilient, Together: Philanthropy & Museums” - **Sandra Aponte**, **Charles Katzenmeyer**, **Carrie Morgridge**, **Geoffrey Banks**, and **Don Cooke**.



The Alliance wishes to express appreciation to the following organizations and individuals that have generously supported the museum community and the 2021 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo.

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## New Jobs



**Horace D. Ballard**, *Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. Associate Curator of American Art*, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA



**Sheri Bernstein**, *Museum Director*, Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles, CA



**Dawn DiPrince**, *Executive Director*, History Colorado, Denver



**Martha Donelan**, *Director of Development*, Santa Barbara Maritime Museum, CA



**Karissa Johnson**, *Curator*, Museum of Nebraska Art, Kearney



**Shana Mathur**, *Chief Strategy and External Relations Officer*, Natural History Museums of Los Angeles County, CA



**Rachel Novick**, *Director of Sustainability*, The Morton Arboretum, Lisle, IL



**Aarón Siebert-Llera**, *Director of Inclusion*, The Morton Arboretum, Lisle, IL



**Ida Tomlin**, *Senior Search Consultant*, Museum Search & Reference, Londonderry, NH



**Michelle Tovar**, *Director of Public Engagement*, Holocaust Museum Houston, TX



**Murphy Westwood**, *Vice President of Science and Conservation*, The Morton Arboretum, Lisle, IL



**Russ Wigginton**, *Museum President*, National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, Memphis, TN

## Retired



**Leslie Swartz** retired from Boston Children's Museum after nearly 43 years. She officially began her career at the museum on September 1, 1978, as the Harvard East Asian Project China specialist. Her lifelong dedication to children and her remarkable accomplishments locally, nationally, and internationally in the museum field have distinguished her as a champion for children, for learning, and for the power of history and culture to transform lives.

## In Memoriam



**Mark M. Johnson**, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) director emeritus, died on June 25 after a long illness. Johnson, who was an esteemed scholar and museum director, led the MMFA from 1994 until his retirement in 2017 when, as the longest-serving chief executive of the institution, he was named the museum's first director emeritus. Over the course of his tenure, Johnson shaped the institution in many ways, including overseeing the addition of hundreds of works of art to the collection, organizing a number of exhibitions and publications, and leading two significant expansions of the museum.



**Lou Casagrande**, former president and CEO of the Boston Children's Museum, passed away on May 27. He retired from the museum in 2009 after 15 years of service. During his tenure, he led the museum through its first major expansion in 30 years, directing a \$47 million capital campaign to expand and renovate the city's first "green" museum. After leaving the museum, Casagrande served as the first dean of the School of Education, Social Work, Child Life, and Family Studies at Wheelock College. He later served as special assistant to the president and CEO at Associated Early Care and Education (now Nurtury).

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# Creative Aging Discussion Guide

Sonnet Takahisa

This Discussion Guide is designed to prompt museum administrators, boards, and practitioners to explore and learn from the innovative creative aging programs featured in this issue. Use the guide to host a conversation with colleagues in your institution or more deeply explore the issue's content on your own.

## Older Adults in Your Community

Marjorie Schwarzer writes that “Museums should combat ageism by incorporating anti-ageist awareness within current diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) initiatives.”

- What are the demographics of your organization?
- How might you incorporate institutional training on implicit ageism and its impact on program design and delivery into your DEAI work?
- Can you undertake an audit of your institution to identify instances of ageist language and behavior?

Lifetime Arts Co-founder and CEO Maura O'Malley points to “program providers in the arts, health, aging, veterans, and parks and recreation sectors... [that] have the potential to collectively impact the quality of older adults' lives in America” as well as “multiple federal, state, and local agencies” interested in researching and funding services that respond to needs of older adults.

- What relationships do you currently have with health organizations, senior homes, and community centers that can offer insights about older adults?
- What other organizations and institutions in your area serve older adults? What can you learn from their programs?
- What kinds of programming are missing in your area?

## Creative Aging Program Planning

Sara Lowenburg describes the diverse programming rooted in local history and culture at multiple sites run by the Louisiana State Museum. One participant remarked that “landmarks I've known my whole life have never felt so alive and vibrant. I now see, feel, and appreciate them with much greater depth.”

- How might your resources spark joy and awaken new appreciations?
- What can you learn from the curiosity and stories that older adults have about your institution?
- What collections objects/exhibitions/gallery spaces do people remember and why?

Both the Louisiana State Museum and the Anchorage Museum creative aging programs intentionally incorporate the wisdom of elders and culture bearers. These teachers provide multiple perspectives and ways of looking at collection objects and traditional artistic techniques.

- How can new audiences, especially those engaged in arts learning, make new connections to your collections?
- What new information about collection objects will the museum gain by inviting new observations, perspectives, and knowledge from different stakeholders, especially culture bearers?

In a region filled with arts providers, Britt Patterson-Weber describes how Naples Botanical Garden created

a program that is not intimidating to art beginners and is filled with plant-centric social activities that put people at ease, build community, and support individual confidence.

- What assets—collections, natural and built environment, archives—in your museum offer inspiration for arts learning, creativity, and social interactions?
- What best practices do you employ in other education programs that can be adapted to meet the intellectual and social needs of older adult learners?

For the “Stay Gold” program at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson, Eli Burke recounts how LGBTQIA+ youth and older adults were invited to together “create and consume contemporary art to make relevant connections between museum exhibitions and their lives.”

- Are there particular communities in your area that do not have natural opportunities for more intergenerational dialogue?
- Who needs to be part of the facilitation team to reach out to these groups, plan, and ensure that individual participants feel safe?
- How will you provide members of the facilitation team the access and support they need to explore your museum’s resources with a focus on the interests of this constituency?

### Shifting to Virtual Programs

The creative aging programs featured in this issue were planned as in-person programs, but most shifted to virtual programming during the pandemic, learning as they went about how to maintain the integrity of the program, adjust schedules and time frames, and take advantage of new online tools for teaching and building community.

- Are there particular community groups that could benefit from virtual creative aging programs, especially due to geographic distance, transportation considerations, or other issues?
- What additional strategies are necessary to ensure community building and connections in the virtual space?
- Who will be left out of the programs due to lack of access to technology and/or lack of digital

literacy? Are there ways that the museum can help to advocate for improvement to the digital infrastructure and literacy?

Online platforms allowed for new types of collaboration and exploration of new teaching tools, and cross-departmental collaboration among education, IT, collections, marketing staff, and volunteers brought new energy and possibilities into the programs.

- How accessible and adaptable are your institution’s online learning platforms for use in art teaching? Do your teaching artists have other suggestions?
- What internal staff partnerships are necessary to plan and implement successful online programming?
- How up to date is your technology and digital infrastructure? What funding opportunities might these creative aging programs unlock for needed upgrades?
- How much time is needed to design and implement online teaching and learning programs?

### Building Long-Term Relationships

Molissa Udevitz at the Anchorage Museum discusses her institution’s work to engage older adults who are not currently being served by the museum.

- As you design your outreach, are you looking to support people who share similar experiences? Or do you hope to create opportunities for dialogue and exchange across people with different experiences?
- What organizations can you work with to co-create museum-based creative aging programs that address the interests, availability, and curiosity of their constituents?

As in all audience development initiatives, it is essential that you do your research.

- What other successful programs for older adults are offered in your area? Are there other sequential arts education programs for older adults?
- How will you collect accurate and honest information about the barriers—real and perceived—for older adults who are not

participating in programs (e.g., lack of awareness, distance, cost, transportation, and a sense of not belonging)?

- Who at your institution will be charged with listening and sharing this information internally?

### Institutionalization

Programmatically, Udevitz says that the Anchorage Museum “is recommitting to strengthening the partnerships with local organizations that serve older adults so these types of programs can continue even if dedicated funds are no longer available.” But she has some ongoing questions about equity and access.

- How can you ensure that you are providing services equitably and not just to those already in the know?
- Creative aging class sizes are usually 15–20 people, and they are labor intensive. Are there ways to scale the model?
- What can you learn from virtual programming, and/or how do you balance the virtual with in-person programming?
- How can you best assess true staff time for programs, including payment for consultant teaching artists and culture bearers and staff time for education/community engagement, visitor services, facilities, administration, curatorial, registrars, IT, marketing, exhibitions, etc.?
- What are the additional costs of the program (e.g., transportation, materials, equipment, exhibition installation, end-of-class celebrations) that need to be factored in when fundraising or creating a business model for these programs? If there are costs for participants, what are older adults able/willing to pay?

Introducing new programs that focus on older adults brings additional work assignments, and Schwarzer reminds us that museums must begin this work by looking at implicit ageism on the part of staff (e.g., in the language and behaviors they present). She strongly encourages museums to include these reflections in ongoing DEAI work.

- How will leadership support the discussion about equitable treatment of older adults in the context of all museum constituents, and what level of

priority will be given to developing initiatives for better serving older adults?

- Who will be involved in decision-making on resource allocation—staff time, finances, facility use?
- Once the museum commits to programming for older adults, who will be involved in contributing to research, developing goals, and reviewing all museum activities and programs to ensure sustained support for programs?
- What kinds of data will the museum use to measure the impact and effectiveness of its programs for older adults?

External partnerships provide museums with invaluable research and information, word-of-mouth advocacy, and program support. All of these Aroha-funded programs cited the value of outside resources in making their programs stronger.

- How will leadership help identify potential institutional partners already engaged or interested in this work?
- How will leadership help quantify and commit the staff time and resources required to support ongoing relationships?
- How will programmers track the benefits and costs of the partnership—new audiences, new funders/funding, professional development opportunities, more time and resource sharing?
- How will new artists, representing diverse traditions and art forms, be incorporated into training on the use of collections and developing arts learning programs for older adults?

**Sonnet Takahisa** is an independent consultant who works in museums, cultural institutions, and schools, focusing on public engagement, community building, and educational reform. She has held education and leadership roles at numerous museums and was the founding co-director of The NYC Museum School. She serves on the boards of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums, Strike Anywhere Performance Ensemble, and EarSay.

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the tropical blooms  
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trumpeting the day, their days  
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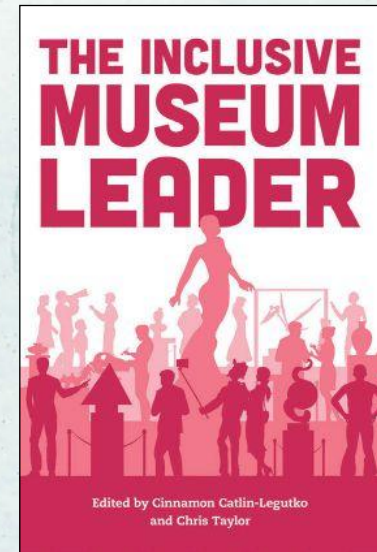
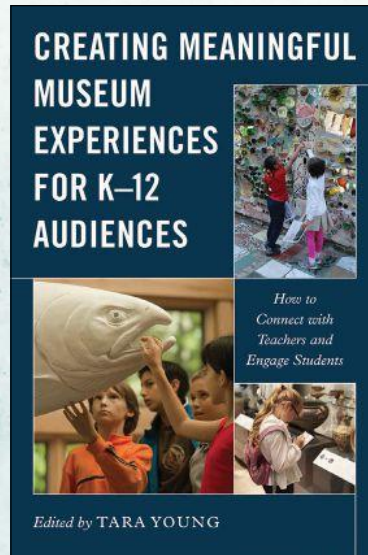
yet it is the littlest ones  
    that i adore  
tucked in the groundcovergreenery  
    unassuming  
    overlooked  
    unintentionally dismissed  
dear in their delicacy  
quietly doing their job

it is the same with people  
    the ones who captivate me the most  
quiet children, never drawing attention to themselves  
civil servants, consistently showing up  
teachers, simply loving to teach

the ground cover  
the exquisite floral modest  
ground cover

From *ground cover* by Judy Lister, a student in Naples Botanical Garden's "Nature Journaling: Botany Through Art" creative aging program.

**Painting by Carmina Rodríguez Villa, a student in Naples Botanical Garden's "Nature Journaling: Botany Through Art" creative aging program**



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