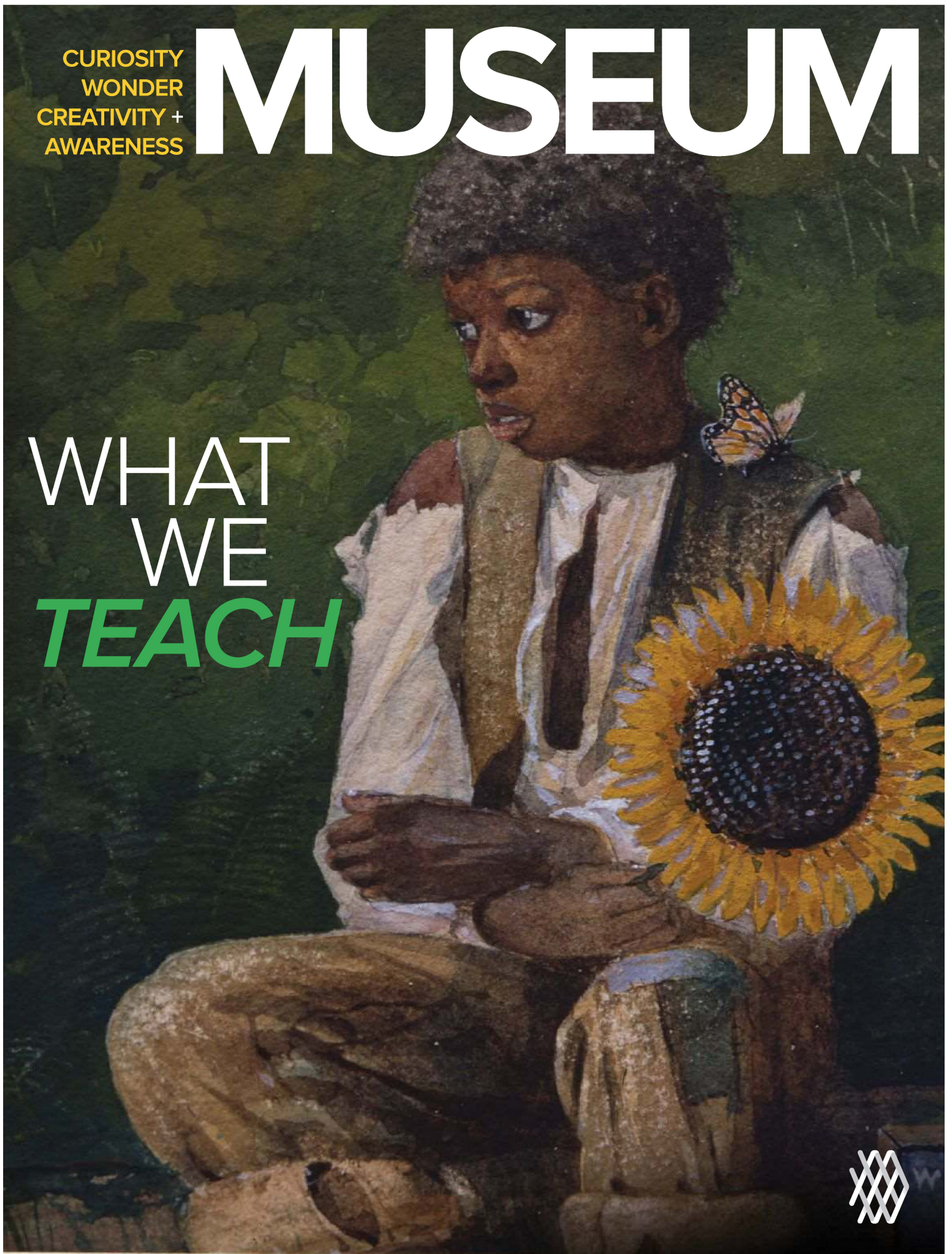


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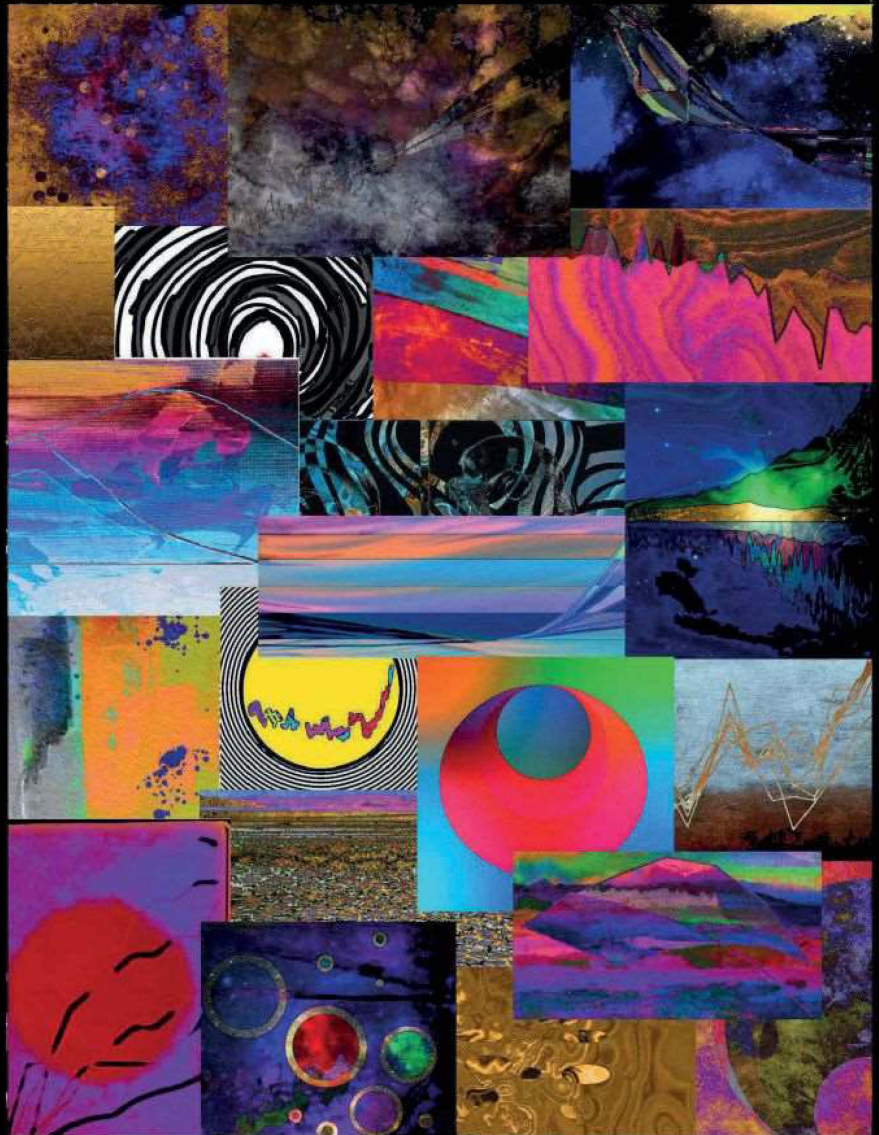
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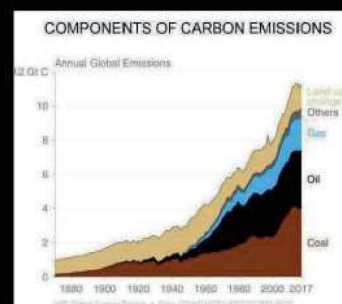
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*[nmaahc.si.edu/  
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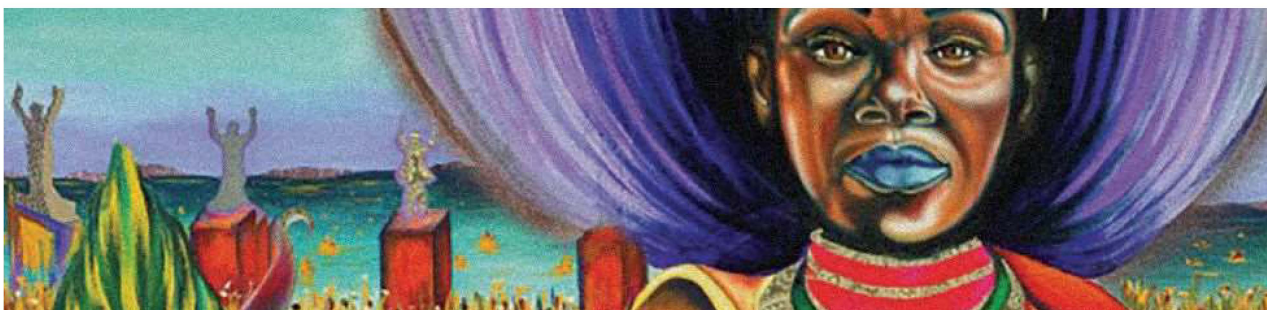
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JULY  
AUGUST  
2023  
ISSUE

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# Learning to Teach

**As this issue ships to you,** I'll be making a big transition, leaving my post as President and CEO of AAM for a new role at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. And while that sadly means this will be the last letter I help write for this magazine, I am glad it's for an edition about one of my deepest passions in the museum world: education.

In recent decades, marked by milestones like AAM's landmark *Excellence and Equity* report in 1992, museums have begun to rethink their approach to education, viewing it increasingly as an active institutional pursuit requiring serious investment rather than a passive outcome of the visitor experience. Today's museums see themselves as centers of lifelong learning, offering educational opportunities for every age, from infants to older adults.

In some cases, this extends beyond short-term programs and into deep engagements, like the American Museum of Natural History's Ph.D. program or The Henry Ford's on-site high school. While examples like these may not be in reach for every museum, they are nonetheless beacons of possibility. Not every museum can run a school, but every museum can seek to integrate itself into its local school ecosystem. This is where I believe some of the most important opportunities for museum education lie.

Part of the reason for this is strategic: by demonstrating that they can be active, year-round partners in something as critical to a community as its schools, museums can demonstrate their value beyond occasional visits. But another, equally weighted part of the equation is values-based. In our tax-funded system, education is divided between the privileged and the underserved, where children born to wealthier parents get wealthier schools and more enrichment opportunities outside of school. Museums can disrupt this divide by lending their resources equitably across the school system, reaching children with enhanced

learning and growth opportunities they may not otherwise get. And in a society where race and class are deeply intertwined, this can also help diversify the people who engage with museums long term, as so many institutions aspire to do.

The good news is that this kind of thinking has become less of a pipe dream and is increasingly standard operating procedure for many museums.

As it happens, pre-K through 12 school partnerships and DEAI were two of the core priorities in the first AAM strategic framework I led as President and CEO in 2016. As I look over the articles in this issue, I'm proud to see how much progress has been made. Look no further than the initiatives described here to find evidence that museums are doing the work, designing thoughtful, sophisticated, collaborative programs that not only make a difference in children's lives, but contribute to more equitable outcomes for our society.

While this is not my goodbye to museums, and I look forward to engaging with you all as a peer from now on, I will still take this transition as an opportunity to pause and celebrate how far we've come. Yes, there is a lot to do, but there is also a lot that's been done. And now for the next chapter.

*Note: I will also take this opportunity to recognize and thank Joseph O'Neill, Natanya Khashan, and many others who have researched, drafted, and edited these columns behind the scenes over the years. Thanks also to Dean Phelus, a rock at the American Alliance of Museums, who has taken this publication to new heights as its editor and who pours his heart into ensuring every issue of Museum is a special one.*

5/8/2023



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Lott". The script is fluid and cursive.

---

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



# Education

89%

of museum-goers think museums give visitors more knowledge, making it the #1 impact of museums.

2/3

Proportion of educators who use museum-created videos in their classrooms.

80%

Percentage of school districts that mention future readiness in their mission statements.

**Sources:** From top to bottom: 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, AAM and Wilkening Consulting; *Teaching Inclusive History*, Naper Settlement, Naperville Heritage Society, and Wilkening Consulting (2021 national study of educators); Pew Research Center analysis of 1,314 mission statements from US public school district websites, collected Nov. 16–28, 2022

By the Numbers was compiled by Susie Wilkening, principal of Wilkening Consulting, wilkeningconsulting.com. Reach Susie at [Susie@wilkeningconsulting.com](mailto:Susie@wilkeningconsulting.com).





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## Shelburne Museum

The Shelburne Museum's Perry Center for Native American Art, which broke ground in the spring, will be a 9,750-square-foot, highly sustainable pavilion that will support the culturally appropriate interpretation and care of Indigenous material culture. Designed and realized through a rigorous process in partnership with Indigenous voices, the Perry Center will be a welcoming space for tribal members and scholars to study and engage with the collection and will reimagine the museum experience for all visitors.

**Location:** Shelburne, VT

**Learn more:**  
[shelburnemuseum.org](https://shelburnemuseum.org)

## Anchorage Museum

"Good Medicine" brings together Indigenous healers and medicine people to collectively create, share knowledge, and practice in community. Unfolding over the course of a year, with a different Alaska Native healer's work presented each lunar cycle, this multidisciplinary exhibition offers diverse opportunities for gathering and exchange.

**Location:** Anchorage, AK

**Dates:** through spring 2024

**Learn more:** [anchagemuseum.org/exhibits/good-medicine/](https://anchagemuseum.org/exhibits/good-medicine/)

## Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

In "Jammie Holmes: Make the Revolution Irresistible," Holmes challenges stereotypes, exploring notions of masculinity, mourning, childhood, and race in his paintings. Rooted in the lived experiences of Black communities in the United States, Holmes' work is part of a continuum of painters who explore the human figure in current social and political conditions.

**Location:** Fort Worth, TX

**Dates:** Aug. 11–Nov. 26

**Learn more:** [themodern.org/exhibition/jammie-holmes-make-revolution-irresistible](https://themodern.org/exhibition/jammie-holmes-make-revolution-irresistible)

## 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.

Artist formerly known (Acoma Pueblo), Polychrome Storage Jar, ca. 1880–90, Perry Collection of Native American Arts; Dustin Newman, *Our Medicine*, 2022; Jammie Holmes, *Just Like Your Father*, 2022 © Jammie Holmes, photograph by Tony Prikyl, courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen



## Huntsville Museum of Art

"Rania Matar: SHE" features 50 large-scale color images of young women in their 20s—the ages of Matar's own daughters—leaving the cocoon of home and transitioning into womanhood. She captures them in the larger arena they find themselves in after leaving home—the global and complicated backdrop that now constitutes their lives in transition.

**Location:** Huntsville, AL

**Dates:** Aug. 19–Nov. 26

**Learn more:** [hsvmuseum.org/rania-matar-she/](https://hsvmuseum.org/rania-matar-she/)



## High Museum of Art

"A Long Arc: Photography and the American South since 1845" will examine the complicated history of the South and reveal its critical impact on the evolution of photography. Featuring many works from the High's extensive collection, the exhibition will include photographs of the American Civil War; from the 1930s–1950s, featuring many created for the Farm Security Administration; from the civil rights era; and from today, as photographers continue to explore Southern history and themes to grasp American identity.

**Location:** Atlanta, GA

**Dates:** Sept. 15–Jan. 14

**Learn more:** [high.org/exhibition/a-long-arc/](https://high.org/exhibition/a-long-arc/)

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## Denver Art Museum

In May the Denver Art Museum unveiled three newly reinstalled collections—Arts of Africa, Arts of Oceania, and Modern and Contemporary Art—to the public for the first time since campus construction preparations began in 2016. The reinstallation and reimagining of the Hamilton Building collections marks the completion of the museum campus following the opening of the Martin Building in 2021.

**Location:** Denver, CO

**Learn more:** [denverartmuseum.org](https://denverartmuseum.org)

## The Butler Institute of American Art

The Butler Institute of American Art has opened its newest addition, the Vincent & Phyllis Bacon Wing, which has 24-foot walls to exhibit larger-scale artworks. Pierre Soulages's ceramic mural, *14 May 1968*, takes center stage, filling the two-story window of the Bacon Grand Gallery so that it can be viewed day and night. A second gallery below the Grand Gallery will showcase permanent collection holdings along with temporary exhibitions.

**Location:** Youngstown, OH

**Learn more:** [butlerart.com](https://butlerart.com)

## The Frick Collection

"Barkley L. Hendricks: Portraits at the Frick" celebrates and explores how Hendricks revolutionized contemporary portraiture with his vivid depictions of Black subjects derived from photographs of hired models or figures he encountered on the street. Through a selection of some of Hendricks's finest portraits displayed in the context of the Frick's holdings, the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue will consider the complex place of European painting in Hendricks's art and how his work, in turn, continues to inspire major artists and designers today.

**Location:** New York, NY

**Dates:** Sept. 21–Jan. 7

**Learn more:** [frick.org/press/barkley\\_l\\_hendricks\\_portraits\\_frick](https://frick.org/press/barkley_l_hendricks_portraits_frick)

Phumelele Tshabalala, *A monument to the iS'panisula as mama feeds the community*, 2021;  
The Butler Institute of American Art; Barkley L. Hendricks, *Lawdy Mama*, 1969,  
The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York



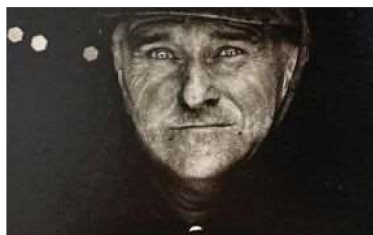
## National Canal Museum

"Coal Country Portraits" celebrates the hard-working men, women, and children who helped extract anthracite coal from Northeastern Pennsylvania, coal that fueled America's industrial growth in the 19th and 20th centuries. Centered on George Harvan's black-and-white photographs of anthracite miners and their families in the 1960s and '70s, the exhibition offers a window into the gritty reality of miners' working lives.

**Location:** Easton, PA

**Dates:** through Dec. 17

**Learn more:** [canals.org/exhibitions/coal-country-portraits/](https://canals.org/exhibitions/coal-country-portraits/)



## Sandy Spring Museum

"Regeneration-Connection-Celebration" is a conceptual showcase of cut paper installations, paintings on canvas, and indoor and outdoor sculptural pieces inspired by Chinese folklore traditions from local artist Shanye Huang. The work explores the interconnectedness and resiliency of the human spirit amid the transformation and regeneration experienced through the pandemic.

**Location:** Sandy Spring, MD

**Dates:** through Sept. 8

**Learn more:** [sandyspringmuseum.org/exhibits-collections/upcoming-exhibits/](https://sandyspringmuseum.org/exhibits-collections/upcoming-exhibits/)

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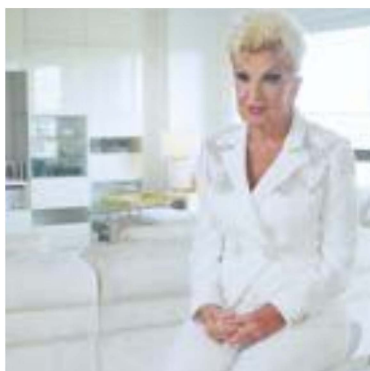
## Grinnell College Museum of Art

“Correspondence: Stephen Appleby-Barr” will be the first US museum exhibition of the work of Appleby-Barr, whose drawing, painting, and printmaking bring together influences from the history of art and literature, his European travels, and the community of friends who gather around his London studio. This exhibition will provide context for the portrait, *Nimco, the Dissertation*, which was acquired for the museum’s collection in 2022.

**Location:** Grinnell, IA

**Dates:** Sept. 15–Dec. 9

**Learn more:** [grinnell.edu/campus-life/arts-culture/museum/exhibitions](http://grinnell.edu/campus-life/arts-culture/museum/exhibitions)



## Peabody Essex Museum

In March, the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) unveiled more than 100 fresh works from the museum’s global fashion and textile collection, including nearly 40 recent acquisitions that spotlight the vibrant and flamboyant collection of Boston-based entrepreneur and doyenne of fashion Yolanda Cellucci. PEM’s Fashion & Design Gallery features more than 180 examples of contemporary and historic dress, as well as textiles, accessories, sculpture, studio glass and decorative arts, and furniture.

**Location:** Salem, MA

**Learn more:** [pem.org/explore-art/fashion-textiles](http://pem.org/explore-art/fashion-textiles)

Stephen Appleby-Barr, *Nimco, the Dissertation*, 2022, photograph courtesy Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto; Yolanda Cellucci, 2022, photo by Chip Van Dyke/PEM



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**More details will be available soon!**

Visit [annualmeeting.aam-us.org](http://annualmeeting.aam-us.org) or  
sign up for updates at:  
[bit.ly/aam2024-updates](http://bit.ly/aam2024-updates)

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**May 16-19, 2024**



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We're thrilled to launch a \$1 million investment in an expanded Museum Community professional development and networking program. Based on feedback from thousands of museum professionals, we're focusing on the three areas cited as your top needs from AAM.



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## Here's how we are striving to meet each of these needs this year:

Expanded **professional development** programs and resources.

Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents cited a need to access more professional development resources through AAM. This year, we began rolling out new on-demand programs, building a team committed to your professional development, and we will pilot our first fall virtual event—the Future of Museums Summit on **November 1-2!**

Deepened **ability to connect** with peers across the field.

We are expanding our current platform, Museum Junction, to serve as a thriving hub for the field; providing connection 24/7, year-round with communities of practice and topics critical to the future of our field! This year, we're piloting a few of the expanded virtual communities.

Broader access to **volunteer opportunities** through the Alliance.

We received hundreds of responses to our call for #AAM2023 Content Advisory Committee volunteers this year! We're using the lessons learned from that process to construct a new volunteer program, and in May, hired a Senior Manager of Volunteer and Member Engagement to create a robust and sustainable program.

**There are more changes ahead** in the coming months and years. For more details, previews, FAQs, and to share your feedback, visit:

➔ [bit.ly/museum-community-investment](https://bit.ly/museum-community-investment)

# Leading from the Front Lines

As museums focus on community engagement, museum educators are more important than ever.

By Jason Porter, Mary Kay Cunningham, and Mariruth Leftwich

**After a once-in-a-century pandemic,**

a historic point of inflection regarding racial justice, the “great resignation,” and an ongoing reexamination of labor practices, museum educators are once again reassessing our roles. While museum education has always been important, its value came into stark relief during the

pandemic. What is less clear is whether the field will acknowledge and support the indispensable role of educators in securing the public’s trust and ensuring the ongoing relevance of our institutions.

During the pandemic, educators were responsible for transforming place-based programs into virtual spaces and by safely

bridging physical barriers. This agile reimagining of museum teaching saw educators teaching on new virtual platforms, producing videos with our phones, learning how to podcast and make TikTok videos utilizing gallery content, creating outdoor exhibits and programs, mailing teaching materials to rural communities,



Educator Cristina Cano-Calhoun facilitates a dialogue at Seattle Art Museum with high schoolers on the photography of Carrie Mae Weems.

Photo by Chloe Collier



and designing and posting lessons for parents to do with their children at home. Typical of educators, we adapted quickly and continued connecting with our audiences and ensuring museums remained accessible and impactful.

In the wake of this volatile period, we have redoubled our efforts to offer experiences that resonate with what people are struggling with or are curious about. Innovative programs developed by creative and adaptable education teams include opportunities for civil discourse, programming for seniors with dementia, social-emotional learning-based tours, and new programs co-authored with Indigenous communities. Museum educators are responding to social and political events that demand we pay closer attention to issues of racial injustice, examining the historical record, addressing the urgency of an ever-warming world, and surfacing issues of representation and colonial practices in museums, just to name a few.

Museum leaders across the field commonly say that “education is all of our jobs,” regardless of our role in the organization, primarily because of our missions. In this

post-pandemic world, it is time for museums to embrace educators’ structures and processes to more accurately reflect a shared focus on education. From where we sit, the success and sustainability of museums will largely depend on it.

### Our Current Challenges

Those of us who work directly with the public are grappling with the political incursion into the educational sphere: threats to free speech and expression, book bans, the demonization of immigrants, challenges to reproductive rights, violence against minority populations, a growing wealth gap, and the restricting of bodily autonomy for LGBTQIA+ people through legislation. The public is looking for institutional reactions to these issues, and museum educators can respond in ways that bridge collections and communities. Museum educators continue to invite visitors into dialogue, use objects and artifacts to look critically at history and institutional practice, and provide resources to develop essential skills like critical thinking, observation, and evidence-based persuasion.

Our work is increasingly taxing and rife with new challenges.

Although museums have always had to navigate controversial issues, new levels of political extremism require an increased commitment to sharing accurate, evidence-based information. Furthermore, along with expectations that staff be culturally responsive, training volunteer educators to both value and adopt these practices is a massive undertaking. If these challenges weren’t enough of a learning curve, educators also continue to struggle to do more programs with fewer resources (like bringing back in-person programming while retaining the slate of online programs initiated during the pandemic).

In addition, museum educators and other staff are questioning labor practices through groups like Change the Museum, Museum Workers Speak, and MASS Action. Addressing labor inequities has been difficult, especially in light of the pandemic when so many institutions scaled back education and other frontline staff, according to the 2021 study by NAEA and Randi Korn & Associates. As a result, many educators are

## RESOURCES

“The Partisan Divide,” *TrendsWatch*, 2023

[aam-us.org/2023/01/13/the-partisan-divide/](https://aam-us.org/2023/01/13/the-partisan-divide/)

Wilkening Consulting and AAM, *Museums and Trust*, Spring 2021

[aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Museums-and-Trust-2021.pdf](https://aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Museums-and-Trust-2021.pdf)

Lora Cooper, Linnea Grim, and Gary Sandling (Eds.), *Bringing Teachers to the History Museum*, 2022

American Alliance of Museums and Wilkening Consulting, *National Snapshot of COVID-19 Impact on United States Museums*, November 2020

[aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/AAMCOVID-19SnapshotSurvey-1.pdf](https://aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/AAMCOVID-19SnapshotSurvey-1.pdf)



Yaoyao Liu leads a close-looking exercise at an educator workshop at Seattle Art Museum.



demanding a new approach to their work—one built less on sacrifice and more on balance and right-scaling, livable wages, and transparency.

### Moving to the Forefront

Despite the volatility of the past several years, museum educators remain poised to meet today's challenges through their commitment to shared authority and audiences, expanding communities of practice, and the assessment

and self-reflection that is embedded in our discipline. Today, we are more focused than ever on working in ways that are symbiotic, reciprocal, and inclusive, and center marginalized voices.

Museum educators are born collaborators, working alongside teachers, volunteers, health care professionals, scholars, community groups, and others to create programs that engage visitors. The museum workplace needs people who can navigate difficult

conversations, can think critically about programming, and are engaged in communities of practice to support innovation, inclusive partnerships, and impact in the interest of relevance, fundraising, and organizational culture.

In our audience-focused roles, we create programs that can engage people in dialogue. We directly address their needs and questions and respond with urgency to issues that arise. In short, our work represents our institutions' missions in action.

It is time for the field to reaffirm the importance of museum educators and to reorganize accordingly. More museum leaders should emerge from our ranks, more resources should be put into the human resources of education departments, and more effort should be placed on recruiting, training, and retaining a diverse group of superstar educators who sustain relationships with the most important constituents our institutions have: the public.

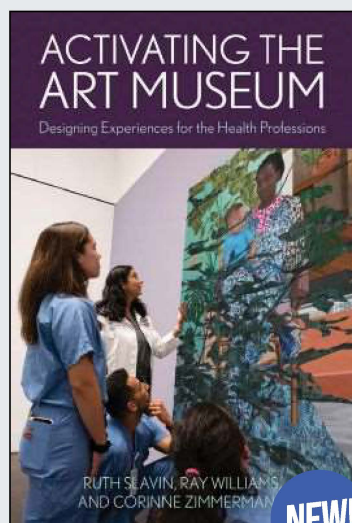
## AN EDUCATOR CONSORTIUM FORMS

Supporting teachers is a hallmark of museum education work. At a summit on teacher professional development in 2019, researchers from Ford's Theatre, Monticello, Mystic Seaport, and Mount Vernon shared their findings on recommended practices. After the pandemic exposed an increased need for communities of practice that span geographical and institutional divides, museum educators who had participated in the summit created an online community, Teacher InSites, to expand educator networks and provide museum resources and pedagogy for classroom teachers. The online work has evolved to include an annual hybrid conference called RevEd and was featured in the 2022 book *Bringing Teachers to the History Museum*.

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# NEW RESOURCES FOR MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS



NEW!

## ACTIVATING THE ART MUSEUM

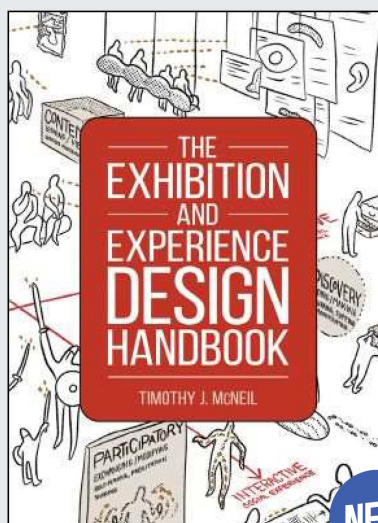
### Designing Experiences for the Health Professions

By Ruth Slavin, Ray Williams,  
and Corinne Zimmermann

"In this timely and inclusive new work, Slavin, Williams, and Zimmerman provide a holistic look at how thoughtfully designed art museum experiences are fostering well-being, empathy, and humanity among healthcare professionals, patients and museum practitioners. The creative and affirming personal narratives and practical applications in each chapter illustrate the value of art museums at a time when their innovative thinking and resources are needed more than ever." —Brenda Cowan, professor, SUNY FIT.

This book offers a framework for collaboration between art museum educators and health professionals.

2023 • 216 pages  
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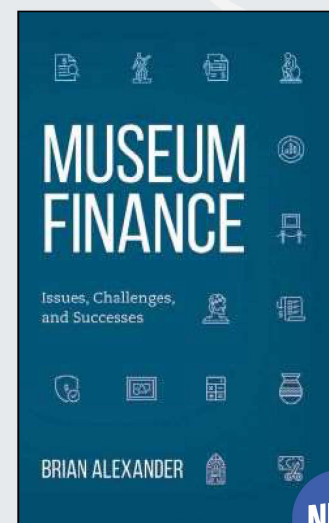
## THE EXHIBITION AND EXPERIENCE DESIGN HANDBOOK

By Timothy J. McNeil

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This full-color book uses real-world examples, museum and exhibition design studio profiles, historical and contemporary voices, and draws on the author's own creative practice and exhibition making experience, as well as contributions from his extensive network of international museum, attraction, and design professionals. The book contains over 250 photographs and drawings.

2023 • 292 pages  
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—James E. Donahue, president and CEO, Old Sturbridge Village/Old Sturbridge Academy/Coggeshall Farm Museum

A comprehensive guide to financial management and stability for museums that provides context for the financial issues faced by museums and offers suggestions to mitigate them.

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# Sharing Tools, Expanding Knowledge

In Science Action Club's Cloud Quest unit, created by California Academy of Sciences, students document sky conditions using GLOBE Observer to help NASA scientists understand the connection between clouds and climate change.





ring  
ledge

California Academy of Sciences is partnering with museums across the country—and the globe—to engage more young community scientists.

By Laura Lerman

**When I first joined** the California Academy of Sciences in 2013, I was surprised to learn that the brightest minds at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—NASA!—rely on ordinary humans like sixth-graders to validate and calibrate their satellite technology. It turns out that at any given moment there are several NASA satellites orbiting Earth, taking photographs of our sky from above and collecting data to determine (among other things) how clouds may affect our planet’s changing climate. While computers are better than most humans at recognizing patterns, they can be less reliable when it comes to making inferences and discerning anomalies, which means anything from smoke to snow could be misidentified as clouds.

But middle school students—along with kids and grownups of all ages—can observe local sky conditions from below and submit their findings directly to NASA scientists through the GLOBE Observer mobile app. This public participation in science research is called “community science,” and for more than a decade the California Academy of Sciences has used it to advance science and environmental learning goals at scale—far beyond the walls of our 410,000-square-foot museum in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park.

Founded in 1853, the California Academy of Sciences is a renowned scientific and educational institution with a mission to regenerate the natural world through science, learning, and collaboration. We are home to a world-class aquarium, planetarium,

rainforest, and natural history museum, as well as innovative programs in scientific research and environmental education. One of those programs, Science Action Club (SAC), leverages our institutional strengths and resources to broaden equitable access to high-quality STEM learning opportunities for youth and educators in out-of-school time (OST) around the country and, more recently, the world.

### Clouds, Birds, and Bugs—Oh My

SAC equips all types of museums, libraries, and neighborhood centers with community science teaching kits that educators can implement with youth participants. Each kit contains 12 activity plans designed for grades 5–8, tools and supplies for groups of 20, and a self-paced online training course that prepares program staff to facilitate learning experiences with confidence and skill.

Each of SAC's three curriculum units—Bird Scouts, Bug Safari, and Cloud Quest—is available in English and Spanish and is anchored by a long-term, global community science project that anyone may contribute to anytime, anywhere. Through games, projects, and hands-on investigations, youth in SAC learn the skills needed to follow each community

science protocol as they develop deeper connections to local nature and a more robust sense of environmental agency.

For example, in Bird Scouts, youth explore flight, feathers, and the features that make birds unique. A bean bag toss prepares students to estimate the number of birds in a flock, while an avian spin on the classic photo hunt game invites youth to sleuth out the subtle variances between the field marks of a northern flicker and a red-bellied woodpecker. With practice, youth develop the technical skills to conduct their own bird count outdoors, and they submit their observations to the scientific community using the renowned community science app eBird.

Similarly, in Bug Safari, youth investigate small creatures with big environmental impacts. In one design challenge, youth evaluate the three essential characteristics that all arthropods share—an exoskeleton, a segmented body, and jointed arms and legs—to determine their specialized functions. Then they devise imaginary arthropods with adaptations for invented habitats. Later, they use collection and identification tools like sweep nets, aspirators, and magnifying loupes to safely trap and photograph arthropods and then submit their observations to iNaturalist, a global

Science Action Club kits contain everything teachers and students need to explore local nature and contribute to authentic science research.







Middle school students use binoculars to observe and identify birds and contribute their findings to the community science project eBird.

social network of 3 million nature enthusiasts who crowdsource biodiversity data for scientific research.

Along with Cloud Quest, the SAC unit that connects to NASA's GLOBE Observer, these dynamic and highly interactive experiences integrate scientific observation, creative arts, and physical movement to inspire curiosity among middle schoolers and empower them to conduct authentic and meaningful scientific investigations.

The benefits of this work are multidirectional. With stronger critical-thinking skills and self-confidence, youth are more likely to become informed decision-makers and engaged members of society. Collaborating with peers and connecting to nature also enhances their social-emotional well-being. Meanwhile, the scientific community gains valuable data that helps propel research and address pressing questions about our changing planet.

But to achieve these gains at scale, the California Academy of Sciences must rely on partnerships with other museums and youth-serving organizations that share our goals and values. As a result of these important alliances, SAC, which started in 2011 with just two after-school clubs in San Francisco, has grown to serve more than 75,000 youth and educators in over 480 cities and towns across 41 states and two countries.

## THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

There is debate about what to call public engagement in scientific research. While it is most commonly known as “citizen science”—in reference to citizens of the world—some feel that the exclusionary nature of that term discourages noncitizens from participating.

The California Academy of Sciences calls such engagement “community science” to avoid that misinterpretation and demonstrate our commitment to inclusivity, though Science Action Club sometimes uses both monikers. To further complicate things, the term “community science” has historically been used by the environmental justice field to describe a specific type of research in which community members design and carry out projects related to neighborhood health.

Given this lack of widespread consensus, we encourage you to consider how these different terms may be interpreted by the youth, educators, and families you work with, and select the one most likely to inspire and engage. By any name, this powerful work can only be accomplished by a global movement of diverse contributors taking positive action for science and society.

## Partnering to Expand Community Science

For Nancy Gronostaj, Education Instructor at the Memphis Museum of Science and History (MoSH) in Tennessee, SAC met an urgent institutional need. MoSH has just four full-time education staff and four part-time educators serving 240,000 annual visitors, and they recently began instructing all classes at the nearby Lichterman Nature Center when the community engagement departments consolidated. According to Gronostaj, most MoSH educators have a background in general science and cultural history but not environmental science or natural history, so they felt underprepared to lead the nature center classes.

Given their other responsibilities, MoSH educators had limited time to research, develop, and implement new content, and they preferred not to source activities from a haphazard internet search. They needed something ready-made and vetted that would meet their high standards of quality for superior learning experiences. SAC was a perfect complement to the nature center's exhibits; kit contents like binoculars and pooters refreshed or expanded their inventory of scientific tools, and the activity plans were fun and easy to follow.

Seeing success in the nature center, museum staff began using SAC materials and activities across their spring and summer camps, public floor touch carts,

and field trips. And to further MoSH's impact on the local community, Gronostaj became a certified SAC trainer. She supports program staff at nearby institutions, such as Girls, Inc. and the Memphis Botanic Garden, so they can facilitate SAC activities at their own sites.

Farther north, the L.C. Bates Museum in Hinckley, Maine, originally used SAC for its summer camp programs. An early 20th century museum full of cabinets of curiosities and Maine wildlife dioramas, the museum operates "on a shoestring budget and with help consisting mostly of a handful of volunteers," according to Museum Director Deborah Staber. She selected SAC because "the materials are so well designed for volunteers and staff who may not have that much experience or background. Even if you have a student helping, they can just pick up a SAC activity and go with it."

But when COVID-19 hit and no one was going anywhere, the museum made a quick pivot and repackaged the SAC materials into more than 12,000 learning kits that they distributed to local elementary school classrooms and families. Now that the building has reopened to visitors, they are leveraging SAC materials in their lending library of activity boxes that families can check out to use at home, outdoors, or inside the museum's ornithology collections gallery. And the museum is again using SAC at its summer camps and outreach events. "Even a week ago one of our educators went to a library and did SAC Birds Scouts as part of the program," Staber says. "Every piece has been used and reused."

When Patricia Barciela, Museum Director at Domus in La Coruña, Spain, first learned about SAC she recalls being "struck by the fact that the approach was through [community] science, which seems to be a different perspective to bring young people into STEM and to encourage a love of nature." Domus had recently made community science a strategic priority and sought to partner with SAC on a youth engagement grant proposal along with two other European museums: MUSE (Italy) and Tavira (Portugal).

The first clubs at Domus launched in 2020, just as the museum was looking for ways to safely engage students during the pandemic. Since then, the museum

## RESOURCES

Science Action Club

**[calacademy.org/science-action-club](https://calacademy.org/science-action-club)**

Citizen Science Toolkit for Teachers

**[calacademy.org/educators/citizen-science-toolkit](https://calacademy.org/educators/citizen-science-toolkit)**

CAS Community Science

**[calacademy.org/community-science](https://calacademy.org/community-science)**

iNaturalist

**[iNaturalist.org](https://iNaturalist.org)**

eBird

**[ebird.org](https://ebird.org)**

GLOBE Observer

**[observer.globe.gov/do-globe-observer/clouds](https://observer.globe.gov/do-globe-observer/clouds)**

SciSctarter

**[scistarter.org](https://scistarter.org)**



A Science Action Club educator supports students as they investigate bird diets by dissecting owl pellets as part of the Bird Scouts unit.



has implemented SAC every school year, expanding from small groups to larger cohorts as pandemic restrictions eased. “Collaborating with the California Academy of Sciences has been a valuable partnership,” Barciela says. “The richness of a program like SAC, with an educational perspective different from what we have explored at the museum so far, has allowed us to offer our young people something very unique. And at the same time, it has allowed us to train our educators by offering them a new point of view to bring environmental education not only to young people, but to the whole of society. SAC is therefore of enormous value to Domus as a museum and to the people who work there as educators.”

The reciprocal value of these partnerships cannot be overstated. The California Academy of Sciences can effect meaningful change at scale only in collaboration with talented and dedicated implementation partners

like those at the Domus, L.C. Bates, and the Memphis Museum of Science and History. Only with their guidance can we tailor our programs to their visitors’ diverse needs and interests and successfully cultivate a culture of belonging that welcomes youth and educators of all backgrounds into STEM. Only together can we equip tomorrow’s leaders to be curious, courageous, and committed to ensuring a regenerative, healthy future for our planet and our people.

**Laura Lerman** is Director of Expanded Learning and Youth Engagement at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. Reach her at [llerman@calacademy.org](mailto:llerman@calacademy.org).






# Widening the Lens

A student tour  
at the Amon  
Carter Museum of  
American Art in Fort  
Worth, Texas.





## The Amon Carter Museum of American Art is engaging students in inclusive discussions of artworks where diversity is not necessarily apparent.

By Megan Wilson Krznarich

**In the museum field,** we recognize that inclusive teaching is important. Institutions have taken great steps to rectify historic inequities, including diversifying their collections and exhibitions.

The Amon Carter Museum of American Art, an institution located in Fort Worth, Texas, that originated with a Western art collection highlighting the works of Frederic Remington and Charles Russell, is focused on collecting works and presenting exhibitions that reflect the breadth of American art. Recent acquisitions, including work by Hank Willis Thomas, Anila Agha, and Shelley Niro, support museum educators in providing inclusive instruction. However, such acquisitions do not eliminate the need to reflect on our teaching practices related to the other artworks that comprise the bulk of the collection—pieces where diversity is not readily apparent.

The Carter welcomes 15,000 elementary and secondary students on guided tours each year. Our museum staff includes 19 members of the education team. Of that team, eight members specifically focus on in-gallery programs for pre-k–12 students and educators, which include inquiry-based tours and collaborating on the creation of student program content. Beginning in 2019, Carter gallery teachers began developing new strategies for infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion into their instruction, as exemplified in the three works discussed here. These artworks are a selection from the teaching content we create each year and would not necessarily be taught together, but they reflect an overall, long-term transition in how we look at and teach the artworks in the Carter collection.

### *The Hunter's Return*

A perennial favorite artwork for student tours is Thomas Cole's *The Hunter's Return* (1845), shown on p. 26. In this oil-on-canvas painting, two men approach a log cabin from an autumnal forest carrying a deer. Women and children greet them from various places around the homestead; their efforts caring for the home are on display in the form of drying laundry, a well-tended garden, and a chimney with smoke indicating a fire.

In prior years, gallery teachers would have focused on the labor of these individuals and why this family would select this site for their home. In some ways, the lesson related to this artwork was one of the easiest to refine, as the work's reference to manifest destiny invites discussion of the impacts of settler colonization. In reassessing our focus with this artwork, we developed the following questions to elicit meaningful student engagement. The questions can be explicitly stated or implicitly addressed through questions tailored to the audience's developmental level.

- What did the artist include in this painting?
- What is the meaning or symbolism of these present elements?
- What did the artist choose to exclude from this painting?
- Considering the artist and the context of the time in which they lived, what message is being communicated?

Our students are primed to call out the obvious: the exclusion of Indigenous communities from this view. We then recognize the many nations that lived in the areas in New Hampshire, New York, and

Courtesy of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art

## TIPS FOR OFFERING MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Many perspectives are needed to create diverse and inclusive content. This can include staff, invested classroom educators, or community partners.

It's easy to fall into old patterns and strategies. You don't have to reinvent the wheel each time, but you should always be open to innovating and improving.

Be true to the collection you have, but acknowledge the context in which those artworks exist.

Connecticut that Cole used as inspiration for this painting: the Abenaki, Tuscarora, Oneida, St. Regis Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Cayuga, Tonawanda Band of Seneca, Poospatuck, Shinnecock, and Mohegan.

As we walk students through the questions, we invite them to map out their responses visually. We provide a sheet of paper, or a reproduction of the artwork, and ask students to note the significant elements. They then overlay tracing paper to identify the meanings of each component and add excluded

elements. Each time we complete this activity, new ideas come to light, which is exactly the point. Students bring their lived experiences into the museum, make meanings, and share their wisdom with their peers.

After inviting students to look critically at the artist's perspective, we provide supplemental images and information on the Indigenous communities that inhabited these lands prior to white settler-colonists. We discuss how Indigenous communities used the land's resources and how that influenced

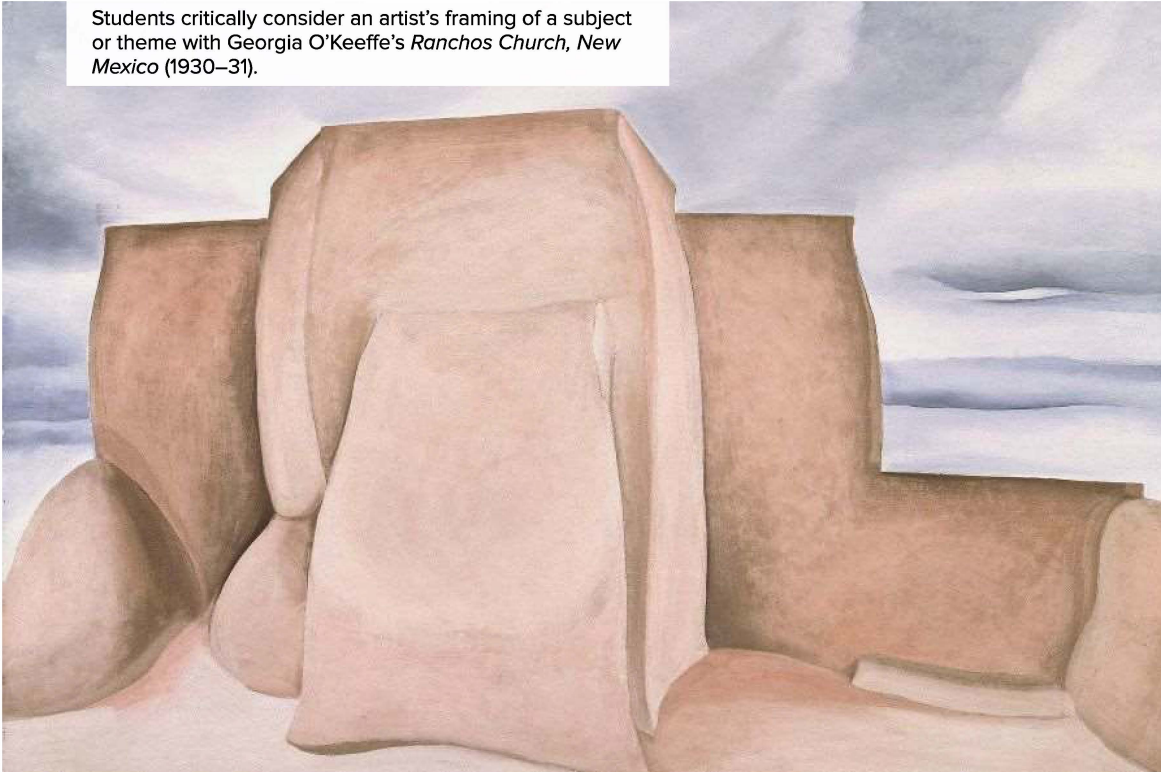


With gallery educators, student visitors to the Amon Carter Museum of American Art dissect what is and isn't portrayed in *The Hunter's Return* (1845) by Thomas Cole.

Oil on canvas, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas, 1983.156



Students critically consider an artist's framing of a subject or theme with Georgia O'Keeffe's *Ranchos Church, New Mexico* (1930–31).



the settler-colonists who came later. It is essential to acknowledge the wisdom provided by Indigenous communities that allowed white settler-colonists to build the United States empire.

### ***Ranchos Church, New Mexico***

As important as it is to have students critically consider an artist's framing of a subject or theme, it is also important to interrogate how we as museum educators frame topics and themes. As we reassessed our "Engineering in Art" programs, we noted a bias toward Western industrial structures. To refine this program, we identified a new objective: providing students with other perspectives of what design could be and is intended to accomplish.

Thus, we added a new artwork to the program, *Ranchos Church, New Mexico* (1930–31) by Georgia O'Keeffe, shown above. In this oil-on-canvas painting, we see a rear view of San Francisco de Asís Mission Church, located near Taos, New Mexico, set against a cloudy sky. In our discussion, we want students to engage with the following questions.

- What is the purpose of engineering?
- What materials and processes have communities developed to respond to their particular needs?

With this artwork, we are able to zoom out from buildings in metropolis centers that often reflect Western priorities and values. While urban structures are impressive and worthy of discussion, what is ideal for one community is not ideal for another.

In the case of San Francisco de Asís Mission Church depicted in the painting, we discuss how adobe brick has many advantages for the community where it is found: it is strong and environmentally responsible and offers thermal regulation. For maintenance, the community comes together each year for the Enjarre, or remudding, of the church. While another design with modern, industrial materials could be sought, the heritage and community-building provided by this adobe design remains desirable for this church.

With Charles Sheeler's *Conversation—Sky and Earth* (1940), gallery educators lead students in a discussion of community need.



### **Conversation—Sky and Earth**

Charles Sheeler's *Conversation—Sky and Earth* (1940), shown above, is another artwork that lends itself to discussing community needs. In this oil-on-canvas painting, an electrical transmission tower dominates the foreground, with the Hoover

Dam and an intensely blue sky filling the background. This painting highlights the might of the United States industrial complex at the outset of World War II, conveying the nation's power through its distinctive vantage point from below the tower.

Oil on canvas, Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas, 2009.7



Prior lesson plans with this work emphasized the purpose of the Hoover Dam and the technological achievements involved in its construction, which remain important talking points. But the museum's acquisition of Cara Romero's *Water Memory* (2015) has helped us expand this conversation with students. The work is an inkjet print showing two Santa Clara Pueblo corn dancers suspended in dark, blue-green water. Romero, a member of Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, draws attention to the displaced Indigenous communities whose lands were flooded to erect dams.

With this in mind, we reviewed our lesson plans for Sheeler's *Conversation—Sky and Earth* to include conversations about how decisions are made related to resources. Essential questions, like the following, underpin these conversations.

- How are the needs of multiple, diverse communities balanced, particularly when planning for infrastructure and land development? Specific to this image, why were the water needs of some placed above the needs and rights of others?
- How does the placement of certain industries impact communities?
- How do we balance short-term benefits (water access for growing urban centers) and long-term consequences (displacement of communities)?

There are no neat answers to these questions, and that is fine. Our goal is to have students grapple with the complex experiences of life in the United States, past and present. Admittedly, these are high-level, abstract questions. To scaffold this down, especially for upper elementary and middle school audiences, we ask students to think about where they live. What resources are found in their community? What resources would they like greater access to? Are there elements that they believe do not serve their community's interests? Connecting to the students' lived experiences is where the magic happens. We are honoring the diverse knowledge that students can contribute to conversations about the artworks.

You may be wondering why we would not just teach with Romero's photograph instead of Sheeler's

painting. If the institution is actively collecting works of art by artists of color or from marginalized communities, why would the education team not utilize them for gallery tours?


The reality is that many of these new acquisitions are photographs or works on paper with limited time permitted for display due to preservation needs. While newer acquisitions by contemporary artists rotate on view, the contributions of white male artists primarily working in painting and sculpture remain the bulk of displayed artwork at the Carter. These works provide a rich opportunity to model for students new ways of critically engaging with art, history, and the many narratives that are created and perpetuated in the past and present United States.

## The Journey Continues

With every lesson we facilitate, we need to critically examine what narratives are present and what narratives are absent. We are looking into the gaps, in the collection and the instruction. When a gap is present, we have an opportunity to establish new strategies for connection with students.

We have already made progress: 92 percent of educators surveyed between August 2022 and February 2023 said the discussion and activities during gallery tours allowed students to connect their lived experiences to American art and artists' stories.


It might seem easier to have diverse and inclusive conversations with artworks that reflect the multiculturalism inherent in the United States, but we remain committed to intentionally having these conversations with any and every artwork. Doing so requires us to reflect on underlying assumptions, ask new questions, decenter familiar stories, and share authority with the students we serve.

 **Megan Wilson Krznarich** is the Manager of Gallery Teaching Programs at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth, Texas. Reach her at [teaching@cartermuseum.org](mailto:teaching@cartermuseum.org).









Children gather  
fall leaves and  
then weave them  
into an ephemeral  
mosaic at Filoli  
in Woodside,  
California.

# Belonging from the Beginning

Filoli works with preschool programs  
throughout the year to help young children  
become comfortable in nature.

All photos courtesy of Filoli

By Erika Frank

“The program aligns with Filoli’s mission to connect our rich history with a vibrant future through beauty, nature, and shared stories.”



**Can you remember** your first memory of a museum or garden visit?

I have two that were pivotal: a field trip to the Getty Villa garden in Los Angeles, and lying in the grass with my preschool classmates, gazing into a tree blooming with monarch butterflies. Being immersed in nature, gardens, and art, I began to feel a sense of belonging in these places. Filoli’s youth programs aim to build that same sense of belonging by helping children grow comfortable seeking out nature and gardens for moments of respite, creative expression, and social connections.

At Filoli—a historic house with 16 acres of formal gardens on a 654-acre estate on the San Francisco Peninsula with 85 full- and part-time staff members—we continuously balance depth of engagement with the number of people served. When we had to pause our elementary school field trip program in 2020 due to the pandemic, we faced a choice: Do we want to bring back a program that serves 10,000 children but lacks a deep connection, or should we create one that serves fewer people but makes a bigger individual impact?

At the same time, we were brainstorming programming ideas for a grant we received through the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) CARES Act Grants for Museums and Libraries program. Through this grant, Filoli received training to create meaningful programs in partnership with marginalized communities experiencing significant cultural, social, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over nine sessions, we, along with the other grantees, met with community organizations to understand their

perspectives and needs and discussed logic models and program ideas for feedback.

In the end, we developed a program model for preschool children centered on Filoli as a place of respite for children and their families. Children ages 3 to 5 visit Filoli three times during the school year in fall, winter, and spring. Filoli reimburses schools for bus transportation. In addition, student families and preschool staff receive a complimentary annual Filoli membership so they can visit on their own.

### Working with Community Partners

As we developed the program, we were guided by our diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) work and research on the impact of COVID on our community. Accordingly, we focused on the following assumptions:

- Children and their families in marginalized communities have been adversely affected by the pandemic.
- Shelter-in-place orders caused strain on family relationships and limited social and outdoor opportunities.
- Families with essential workers saw each other infrequently because of COVID.
- Filoli is a place where community members have found respite during the pandemic, but ticket prices and lack of public transportation created barriers for some.
- Recent immigrants or BIPOC visitors may not feel comfortable or a sense of belonging in a historically white, affluent space.

Following a tenet of the Sites of Conscience training, we did not want to develop a program based on what we *think* a community needs. We needed





Tasting honey,  
apples, and grapes  
from the orchard  
connects children to  
how food is grown.



## PRESCHOOL PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Children are more connected to where their food comes from when they are exposed to a vegetable garden and fruit trees.
- Children appreciate how precious water is after being introduced to the water cycle and the concept that plants need water to grow our food—a first step toward social responsibility around water use.
- Children learn that there are many types of pollinators and that they play an important role in making our food.
- Children become comfortable learning through observation and using all of their senses to explore nature.

partners to determine if we were on the right track. A board member introduced us to Chinatown Community Children's Center (CCCC) in San Francisco, which provides bilingual childcare and social services to families that are below the standard income level. Our second partner, Peninsula Family Service (PFS) in San Mateo, also provides early learning programs to low-income families. Both organizations have preschool programs that offer a holistic approach to early childhood education that includes field trips.

We invited teachers and preschool directors from CCCC and PFS to visit Filoli and walk through the grounds and the house, envisioning the experiences they wanted the children to have. We also discussed logistical challenges. Both organizations have existing field trip programs, so the teachers already had elaborate bathroom break plans and knew to take advantage of the soothing bus ride to lull the children to sleep for naptime. This past experience proved crucial in the piloting phase. As we've opened up to more preschools, managing these logistics has become a barrier to participation for some preschools new to field trips.

We knew we wanted the children to visit multiple times over the school year so they could experience the garden in different seasons and have time to visit the historic house. Introducing topics in the first visit and revisiting them in subsequent visits also helps build knowledge. The schools were open

to this concept and agreed that it would help the children become comfortable in nature and gardens over time. Buses for these repeat visits was cost prohibitive for the schools, so we used IMLS grant funds to pay for them. Filoli continues to fundraise for transportation costs related to the program.

The program aligns with Filoli's mission to connect our rich history with a vibrant future through beauty, nature, and shared stories. It meets many goals in our Strategic Plan (increased access for families), DEAI Plan (a place of respite for underserved communities), and our Interpretive Plan (telling stories of agriculture and water).

### Year-Round Experiences

After a year of testing the program with CCCC and PFS, we now have an engaging menu of activities for every season. Centering the visits around food production and tasting reinforces where our food comes from and that water is essential. We received a curriculum development grant in 2022 for civics education from the Marder-Vaughn Center for Historic Sites Interpretation & Education at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This allowed us to hire a consultant who helped fine-tune existing curriculum and add activities focused on responsible water use.

Each student receives a free book that reinforces concepts from the field trips and facilitates experiences with adults at home. We offer three books for



the teachers to choose from: one on Asian vegetables, a Spanish-language option, and a book on the water cycle.

In fall, we meander through the fruit trees in the orchard and discuss which color of apple is their favorite. We collect fall leaves to weave into an ephemeral mosaic on a loom. We visit the bee hives and learn about pollinators—a topic we revisit in the formal garden during spring when we collect sticks and petals to build ephemeral bug houses for our pollinator friends.

In winter, we learn the phases of the water cycle so children can begin to understand how precious water is in the West. As staff, we happily lose all our inhibitions as we embody clouds and rain to teach the children the water cycle song. We visit the ballroom to see the 100-year-old murals of a lake in Ireland and listen to the soundscape of rain and water sounds.

Filoli can accommodate up to 60 students and teachers, with one staff member from our Learning & Engagement team assigned to every 30 people. We know that weather, potty training, or lack of engagement in a specific activity can upend our plans, so staff stay nimble to adapt to the needs of each school and keep the kids engaged.

To provide students and their families with regular access, we created a new membership level called Community Plus that every participating household receives. CCCC asked Filoli to provide memberships to the teachers as well as the families. They are essential workers, generally receive low wages, and also need places of respite and healing.

## Evaluating Our Impact

We regularly ask preschool staff for feedback via phone and in-person conversations after the programs. We initially worried that using words like “evaporation” in songs was too advanced, but the teachers loved introducing new vocabulary. We’ve also learned to reassure teachers that the children do not need to use their quiet voices in the house, and they don’t need to stay on the paths in the garden. We want the children to explore, sing, and fully engage in the space. Oral histories and photos tell us the grandchildren of Filoli’s owners played in the


house and garden. Why not let these children do the same to help foster connection and belonging?

We are still working to further break down barriers to access and communication. A number of the children and their families are English language learners, and we ask the preschools for help translating the membership welcome letter into the families’ native languages. We have prioritized hiring bilingual program staff to communicate with children when they visit. We now have a native Spanish speaker on staff, and we would like to offer translation for the Chinese students also.

Foundations and individual funders have responded very positively to Filoli’s model of multivisit youth programs: the John & Marcia Goldman Fund awarded Filoli a \$150,000 grant in 2023. Funder generosity has allowed us to expand from serving two preschools in the pilot to 16 in the 2022–23 year, add teen programs, and begin planning for the 2023–2024 school year.

We are currently piloting a similar program model for teens, in partnership with the Boys & Girls Club and multiple programs that help under-represented students get into and succeed in college. The program goal is similar: to provide opportunities for shared social experiences outside the home and school to build resilience for students and the school community.

“Our children and teachers had a joyful time on the Filoli hands-on field trip,” said the Program Director for the Chinatown Community Children’s Center after one visit. “The garden, veggies, and plants refreshed and revitalized everyone’s mind, soul, and body. We haven’t gone out to enjoy nature as deeply as last Friday.” We hope to hear many more similar comments as we continue this work.



**Erika Frank** is the Director of Learning & Engagement at Filoli in Woodside, California. Reach her at [efrank@filoli.org](mailto:efrank@filoli.org).



The High Museum of Art considers polarization, values, and civic good in its art education programs.





Knut Niehus/Alamy Stock Photo

## Our nation's increasingly polarized political climate

requires museum educators to navigate sensitive topics and conflicting opinions, subjects that previously were often kept private in the name of gracious welcome. At the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, an art museum with an educational mission, we take this responsibility seriously. We prioritize our work as a knowledge-building institution by developing new lines of inquiry and sharing ideas through our collections, exhibitions, and programs, thereby engaging broader conversations that shape today's world.

To do this, we have implemented two key educational interventions: first, a high-level strategy for engaging school districts with restrictive curricular mandates and, second, an on-the-ground set of principles (and revised language) for museum educators discussing charged topics with diverse audiences.

### School Districts and Museum Curricula

Each year, we develop contracts with local school districts that articulate our commitments to one another. Last fall one of our districts provided a draft contract with a new addition:

**Neutral:** All services provided by Organization under this Agreement will be secular, neutral, and non-ideological in content.

By Andrew Westover

This addition reflects our current political context. Across the US, educational curricula within and beyond schools are being reviewed with greater rigor due to concerns from local officials, parents, and other stakeholders regarding what children learn.

This particular phrasing, however, was a problem for us as an art museum. The prohibition of “non-neutral” content, at face value, encompasses most of the art in our collection. As written, the addition seems to forbid students from seeing any work that contains religious imagery or icons (much of our European and African collections), work that conveys or engages with any ideology (much of our modern and contemporary art), or work that conveys a perspective other than “neutrality” (arguably all of our collection, as each work is made from a specific perspective). Functionally, keeping this contract addition would make school visits nearly impossible.

Faced with this dilemma, I discussed with our school and teacher team how best to respond. We quickly deduced that the district’s intended goal was not, in fact, to limit student exposure to art; rather, the goal was to mitigate cultivation of dogma, of religious and/or ideological bias in curriculum.

The museum is a site of knowledge production, and we recognize that good ideas are rarely created in a vacuum. To build high-quality learning experiences, we cannot limit our teaching to a single way to proceed, but instead must consider a broad spectrum of ideas. Doing so allows learners to critically engage with the greater body of experiences, identities, affinities, and beliefs that shape our contexts.

Working alongside the museum’s general counsel, we ultimately offered the district a counter-proposal:

**Non-Dogmatic:** All services provided by Organization under this agreement will be non-dogmatic in content.

The district agreed to our revised language. Rather than interpreting the district’s proposed language as an attack on experiences, identities, affinities, or beliefs, we clarified what museum education can be at its best: non-dogmatic, able to approach and consider radically different perspectives in a productive learning environment.

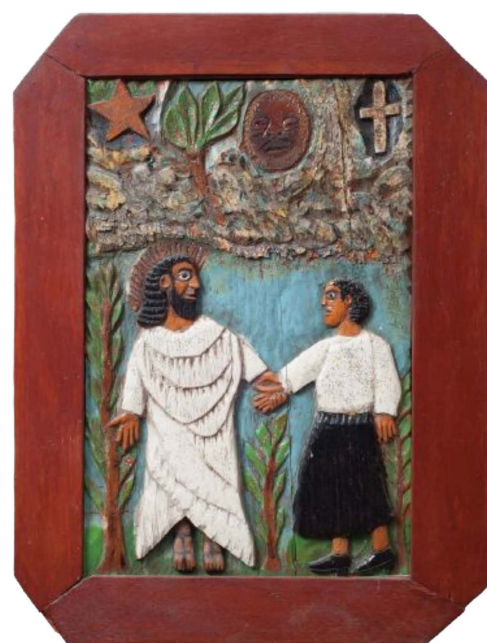
## Gallery Learning as Ethical Practice

Museums are a place where art gets to be public, and publicly presented art speaks to all who enter a space. Museum professionals must therefore ask an ethical question: How should we interpret the ways art intersects with people’s contexts?

Museum educators have, over time, held different interpretive principles. Some of the earliest museum educators were collectors: people who amassed art and curiosities and were often eager to transfer their perspective and values to others. With the rise of public museums, more people began to see art collections, and visitors interpreted art using their own values.

As the field professionalized, museum educators began to understand that they were not only conveyors of expert knowledge to a broad public but also listeners developing community engagement. Museum educators, then, began to convey the needs and desires expressed by members of the public to museum leaders, creating a more dialogic framework for art interpretation.

As we consider how our museum’s collections and exhibitions connect with our visitors, four words serve as a bridge: experiences, identities, affinities, and beliefs. Their abridged versions follow:





**Affinity:** an attraction or feeling of kinship

**Belief:** a value or set of values

**Experience:** something that happened and is remembered

**Identity:** characteristics that establish a sense of self

We invite people who want to emphasize cultural similarities and those who want to emphasize cultural differences to see the value of one another's perspectives along these four trajectories. Importantly, these words also negotiate ideas that otherwise can be held as antagonistic poles of political belief. We do not frame our work as emphasizing equity and diversity on one side, or shared national identity and religious sentiment on the other side. Instead, we seek to create a public space that welcomes all Atlantans, one where anyone can ask questions, learn, and grow.

This is not an easy mission—it is much easier to bond across shared values than it is to generously consider a position different from one's own—but we see this as critical work for knowledge building and our responsibility as a civic institution.

### Values-Engaged Gallery Teaching

To introduce this perspective to our newest docent class, we recently hosted a session called

“Understanding Our Values.” This session frames the work of teaching and learning as a generative ethical space. First, we acknowledge that artworks express values. Sometimes, an artwork expresses values that correspond well with our own, and sometimes an artwork expresses values that raise questions or differ dramatically from our own. Uniquely, the museum is a civic space where we can productively investigate these similarities and differences.

We began the session with works of art. After visually exploring the works, we posed provocative questions. With Elijah Pierce's *Christ and Lady* (below, left), we asked, “What does it mean to consider a work of art that, for example, was made by a person whose father was enslaved and includes Christian iconography?” With Thornton Dial's *Crossing Waters* (below, middle), we considered, “What does it mean to value an artwork made from materials collected from a rubbish heap and then hidden in a barn?” Then, with Edmonia Lewis's *Columbus* (below, right), we asked, “How do we witness a figurative sculpture that conveys multiple histories?”

Atlanta is a unique city, and our museum draws people with vastly different lived experiences.



The High Museum of Art used these artworks from the collection in a session for new docents called “Understanding Our Values.”



# TIPS FOR VALUES-ENGAGED TEACHING AND LEARNING

**Accept that self-knowledge is critical for any engagement with values.** What experiences, beliefs, identities, and affinities inform your sense of self and how you see the world? How do you describe your own social values, and how do you describe those of others?

**Consider how a particular artwork represents or questions values.** What values are foregrounded, and who holds those values? What values are not foregrounded, and who holds those values? How does that influence our understanding of the artwork? Does our understanding of an artwork shift if we consider the values of the artwork's maker, commissioner, and/or caretaker?

**Understand that many words about values are charged—positively or negatively—in specific communities.** What words will you use to describe specific experiences, beliefs, identities, or affinities so that each visitor in your group feels welcomed and affirmed?

**As you welcome your group, intentionally notice what values they bring with them.** What experiences, beliefs, identities, and affinities motivate them, and how might these be meaningfully engaged in the tour?

**Respond to disagreement with questions.** Instead of ignoring someone who expresses distaste or disagreement, or quickly moving on, ask, "What makes you say that?" Asking, "What is your criteria for art?" can start productive conversations about the values people bring to a museum.

**Don't be afraid to "reset" a tour!** If a conversation gets overly charged or heated, invite visitors to spend some time observing a work of art in silence, reflect in smaller groups, or consider a different artwork before returning with a new line of inquiry to the art or idea in question.

**Affirm what people offer.** Express gratitude when people offer insights into values that shape their engagement with art. As relevant, add context to your affirmation and explicitly call out which of the four values the person references, so the full group can better understand the contribution.

Everyone, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, income, politics, social class, or disability, can and should be able to engage with artworks in our galleries. Each teacher and learner brings a specific set of experiences to the table, and museum educators must notice and appreciate these social values.

However, before we can engage with others, we must first ask ourselves: What experiences, beliefs, identities, and affinities inform my sense of self and how I see the world? Further, how do I describe my own social values, and how do I describe those of others? In our session, we explored the

definitions of our four key words to frame social values and how we individually hold these ethical considerations.

Then we moved the focus to the people who join us for gallery learning experiences. Rather than assume that all people in a group are equal, or that all groups are the same, we strive to see people with the same degree of observational nuance that we offer works of art. What experiences or beliefs motivate a person, and how does that show up in their speech and behavior? What identities or affinities do they express? Are they seeking these




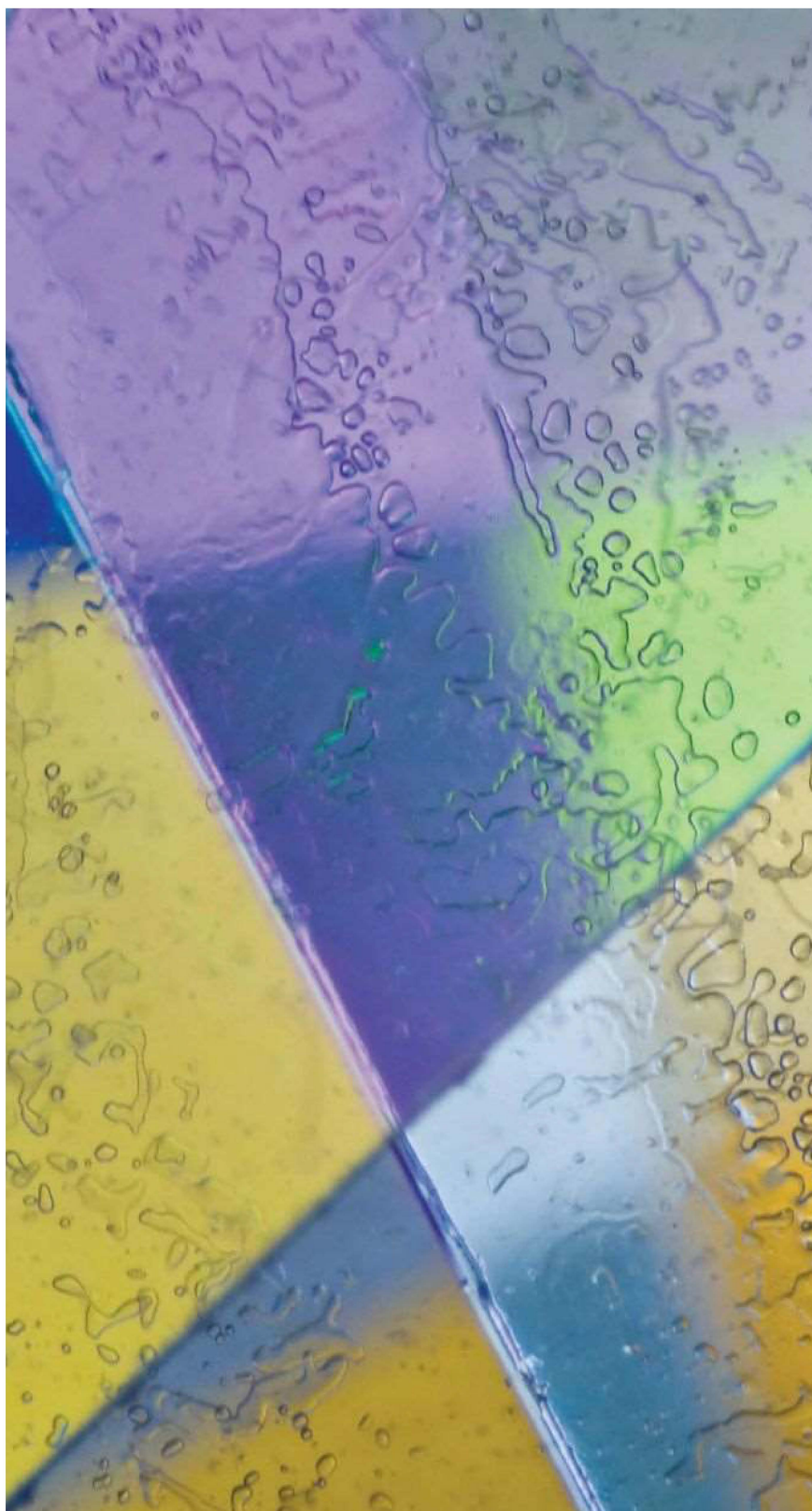
same identities and affinities here? These questions should inform how we act, react, and facilitate tours, with a constant goal of welcoming every person and group.

Importantly, this is a constant learning process; we can never fully know a person's experiences, identities, affinities, or beliefs, and it is often even harder to detect such values when engaging strangers. As educators, however, it is imperative that we attend to such realities, as the ways visitors conceive and build their values deeply impact how they engage with art and one another at the museum.

Art includes values that may resonate with some visitors and raise questions from others. We ask gallery teachers at the High to be prepared and willing to “go there” with visitors, engaging each artwork and visitor with sensitivity and nuance. We seek to honor and respect each person, even (and, perhaps, especially!) when they express values that differ from our own. During our tours, we must listen deeply and notice when our words resonate and when we need to monitor and adjust, or moderate, to build deeper understanding.

When we invite visitors to engage with multiple perspectives and histories in art, we create opportunities to better understand ourselves, one another, and the wider world. Both our interventions—engaging school districts with restrictive curricular mandates and adapting these principles for museum educators discussing charged topics—offer replicable strategies for cultural institutions facing similar challenges.

 **Andrew Westover**, Ph.D., is the Eleanor McDonald Storza Director of Education at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia. Connect with them on LinkedIn or Instagram: @keepingeye.





# Meeting an Educational Need

To reach rural schools, staff at the William King Museum of Art get in the Van and Gogh.



By Charlotte Torrence

Art Youth Education staff from William King Museum of Art in Abingdon, Virginia, show off one of the museum's VanGogh vans.



**For elementary school children** in Southwest Virginia, Vincent Van Gogh's name evokes not only the expected vision of swirling colors in a starry sky, but also an eagerly anticipated visit from one of the William King Museum of Art's (WKMA) decorated vans. WKMA's VanGogh Outreach does not have anything to do with the post-impressionist. The name refers to the fact that we use our "vans" to "go" out into local second- and third-grade classrooms with totes filled with art supplies and captivating props for an art enrichment experience.

VanGogh Outreach covers 11 counties in rural Southwest Virginia, reaching 44 elementary schools, about 200 classrooms, and about 4,200 schoolchildren over the course of a school year. All 11 counties participate in the third-grade program, and four counties participate in the second-grade program, as well. We visit every participating classroom three times a school year for a 90-minute program. Four instructors drive the museum's four VanGogh vans up to two hours away to reach the rural school systems that make up our service area.

VanGogh Outreach is WKMA's largest education program. It began in 1999, when WKMA leaders realized schools were having a difficult time making it to the then-art center for field trips. Rural schools an hour or more away struggled to allocate the time and funding to transport children to the museum. The art center partnered with local schools, officials, and the Virginia Board of Education to develop a solution that would fit the needs of regional schools.

WKMA is, from its founding, an institution that not only preserves and displays the cultural arts and crafts heritage of southern Appalachia, but is also quite literally shaped by its surroundings and acts in response to community needs.

### The Local Context

WKMA, a small art museum in Abingdon, Virginia, supported by 15 full-time staff and a yearly operating budget of approximately \$1 million, is the only AAM-accredited museum in Virginia west of Roanoke. Nestled in the scenic Blue Ridge Mountains and close to Tennessee, West Virginia, Kentucky, and North Carolina, WKMA is proudly Appalachian (importantly, pronounced app-uh-latch-an).

WKMA was founded as the William King Regional Arts Center in 1992 as part of a project to renovate and repurpose the 1913 building that was formerly William King High School. WKMA's Betsy K. White Cultural Heritage Project began in 1994 as a survey of regional arts and crafts. This project now fills our permanent collection gallery and has led to over 40 original exhibitions and two books. The museum's three rotating galleries are dedicated to historic regional artifacts, contemporary regional art, and global historical or contemporary art. Fulfilling the tagline "never the same museum," we maintain a schedule of eight to 10 changing exhibitions every year. WKMA is open seven days a week and always free to visit.

Abingdon is a small town of about 8,000 people, and the 21 counties that make up the entire region of Southwest Virginia contain roughly half of the population of Richmond, the state's capital. Furthermore, much of the region has limited financial resources. For example, from 2017 to 2021 Dickenson County reported a median household income of \$33,905, compared to the state average of \$80,615. Lee County reported a poverty rate of 25.1 percent. Both counties participate in the VanGogh outreach program. Roughly half of the schools we visit have no art teacher.

Southern Appalachia is a historically disadvantaged region, but it is also home to a deep-rooted folk arts and crafts tradition. Abingdon was founded as a town along the Great Wagon Road that led settlers west from Philadelphia. Craftsmen arrived early in the town's history to sell furniture, ceramics, rifles, and more to those seeking new homesteads in the mountains. Washington County, home to Abingdon and WKMA, was the largest producer of ceramics in the country in the years following the Civil War. Craft was also a necessity of living in a region isolated from the development occurring in eastern cities. Spinning, weaving, quilting, and basketry were commonly practiced throughout the 19th and even 20th centuries when industrialization had eliminated the need for household textile craft in other parts of the country.

WKMA reaches a geographically wide service area to offer cultural heritage preservation and art education to a rural population that could not otherwise access an AAM-accredited art museum.

### Using Art to Enhance Learning

A VanGogh Outreach classroom visit lasts 90 minutes and includes a 30-minute history lecture and a 60-minute art project based on that history lesson. These lessons are an introduction to, or reinforcement of, the Virginia social studies Standards of Learning. The history lecture always includes 3-D visual props, often replicas of artifacts or artworks, keeping with the museum's object-based learning standard. The three third-grade VanGogh visits cover ancient Greece and Rome, ancient China, and ancient Mali. Second-graders in Virginia learn about Native Americans, and our three visits review the Eastern Woodlands, Plains, and Southwest regional cultures.

In the fall of 2022, we began connecting social studies topics to math, science, and reading. For example, for ancient Greece and Rome, students created and decorated a cardstock tetrahedron, also known as a four-sided triangular pyramid. Transforming several 2-D equilateral triangles into a 3-D shape helps students actualize the abstract

polygons that they learn about in third grade. We also discuss how the ancient Greeks associated Aristotle's elements—earth, water, air, fire, and later aether—with Plato's five geometric 3-D shapes, and students often create element-inspired designs on the faces of their shape. This engaging, interdisciplinary lesson is relevant to existing classroom topics while also bridging subjects and broadening historical understanding.

For ancient China, we painted floral blue decorations on white plant pots to emulate Chinese pottery. We also provided wildflower seeds for these pots so that students could witness the plant cycle that they learn about in third-grade biology. Some teachers chose to use the pots and seeds as a classroom science project. In the final lesson, ancient Mali, students created drums like those used by griot storytellers. Museum instructors shared a shortened version of the tale of Sundiata, the founder of the Mali Empire, and students broke down the key plot points of the story: a third-grade language arts exercise.

## HOW TO DEVELOP A SCHOOL OUTREACH PROGRAM

**Reflect:** examine how your museum's mission relates to the needs of the community.

- Does the mission mention object-based education? Is that missing in local schools?
- Is your museum seeking to address a disparity in the community? Could outreach help bridge a gap in educational opportunities?
- Are there schools that don't have the time or resources to send children on field trips to your museum?

**Collect data:** how can you illustrate the need for an outreach program to present to potential funders?

- Is there a community in your service area that doesn't visit the museum?
- Is that community lacking resources compared to those that more regularly visit the museum?

**Seek support:** are there donors, lawmakers, or school officials who will support this initiative?

**Focus on quality:** work with your state department of education, survey teachers, and hire full-time, experienced instructors if possible. Delivering an effective program is the best way to ensure schools and funders will want you back year after year.

**Review:** send out surveys you can use to build a database of comparable survey data over time.



For Eastern Woodlands cultures, second-graders translated a Haudenosaunee story about the mythical hero Waynaboozhoo into drawings on Model Magic beads. Museum instructors used pipe cleaners woven into plastic grids to replicate the style of Plains-culture quillwork, using symmetry as a design concept and mathematics connection.

Finally, for the Southwest region lesson, students examined images of genuine, historical artworks and symbols and created “fossils” by pressing shells into clay slabs to replicate Anasazi petroglyphs, connecting a science topic to history and art. Fossils can be found alongside Anasazi petroglyphs in Southwestern canyons and may have informed the development of Southwestern cultural belief systems. We used recent publications developed by or in collaboration with tribe members when developing these lesson plans. We wanted our lessons on Native American cultures to be in touch with contemporary research.

By reinforcing social studies lessons from Virginia Standards of Learning, we can fit this program into teachers’ busy schedules while offering children an object-based and project-based educational experience. We always ask students if they remember what we talked about the last time we were there, and the kids demonstrate strong recall of the history lessons and especially the art projects. I have even met many adults in the region who tell me about the VanGogh visit they had as kids—their favorite day of school.

VanGogh Outreach is funded by a consortium of private donors, primarily foundations formed to fund programs for the counties we visit, and the school systems. Half of the cost is fulfilled by the schools, billed after the three visits are completed, and the other half is covered by the annual foundation donations.

### Improving a Needed Program

We email surveys to teachers immediately following each visit, using a mix of 1–5 “do you agree” questions so that we can gather consistent, comparable quantitative data. The surveys also include free-response questions whose answers help us reflect on the program. We also use those answers as testimony in grant applications.



A student decorates their ancient-Mali-inspired drum during a VanGogh Outreach visit.

Teachers often share that several barriers prevent them from being able to provide this kind of experience to students on their own. They would need to purchase all of the art supplies themselves, find time to develop the lesson plan in addition to their regular lesson plans, and then fit the extra activity into their teaching schedule. WKMA and school principals manage the scheduling for VanGogh Outreach, often rearranging recess and lunch times on the days we visit.

Art education is largely unavailable in our region, and VanGogh offers art enrichment that advocates for the effectiveness and value of art education. It has never sought to be a replacement for in-school art education, or to act as a “band-aid” for that missing element. Unfortunately, art education has not increased in our region since 1999, and sadly some seem to see this program as a sufficient art experience for elementary students.

Even though outreach such as this does not directly bring people inside the museum, it is an important part of WKMA’s mission. After a VanGogh visit, every student is given a sticker that includes the name of the program, museum, and donors. I recently received a phone call from a parent after her child came home from school and told her what they did in class that day. She had never heard of WKMA and was excited to bring her children to the museum.

**Charlotte Torrence**, M.A., is the former Youth Education Director of the William King Museum of Art in Abingdon, Virginia. She is currently a Program Coordinator at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia.

## TRIBUTES AND TRANSITIONS

### New Jobs



**Amanda W. Dotseth**, Ph.D.,  
*Linda P. and William A. Custard  
Director, Meadows Museum,  
SMU, Dallas, TX*



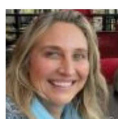
**Ruth Erickson**, *Barbara Lee  
Chief Curator and Director of  
Curatorial Affairs, Institute of  
Contemporary Art/Boston, MA*



**Caitlin Swindell**, *Curator of  
Collections and Exhibitions, Lowe  
Art Museum at the University of  
Miami, Coral Gables, FL*



**Tricia Edwards**, *Deputy  
Director, Smithsonian Traveling  
Exhibition, Smithsonian  
Affiliations, Washington, DC*



**Leah Melber**, Ph.D., *President  
& CEO, Adventure Science  
Center, Nashville, TN*

### Retirement



**Suzanne LeBlanc** retired as President of Long Island Children's Museum in May. LeBlanc led the museum for 17 years, during which time the museum received the National Medal for Museum & Library Service and earned accredited museum status. Her 48-year career in museums included positions at Boston Children's Museum and Brooklyn Children's Museum before she took on the role of Executive Director of Lied Discovery Children's Museum (Las Vegas). LeBlanc was frequently asked to present and write for the museum field, and she authored "The Slender Golden Thread, 100 Years Strong: The Children's Museum Movement Celebrates its Centenary" for *Museum News*.

### In Memoriam



**John W. Jacobsen**, President of White Oak Associates and CEO of the nonprofit White Oak Institute, died on January 12. In the 1980s, as Associate Director of Theaters and Marketing at the Boston Museum of Science, he executive produced the \$24 million Hall Wing and Mugar Omni Theater. Through White Oak Associates, a firm he founded and ran with his wife, Jeanie Stahl, he led strategic planning, production, and marketing initiatives for new science centers, history museums, children's museums, and other family learning centers. White Oak also formed a network to provide financing for *The Living Sea*, which was nominated for an Oscar. He was co-founder of AAM's Green Museums PIC. In retirement, he shared his knowledge of museum planning and innovative thinking and new models in three books published by Rowman and Littlefield.

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## REFLECTION

By learning  
you will teach;  
by teaching  
you will  
learn.

Latin proverb



Winslow Homer, *Blackboard*, 1877  
Gift of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr., in honor of the 50th anniversary  
of the National Gallery of Art



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This issue of *Museum* is all about museums' impact. For more inspiration on planning and sharing about that impact, browse these categories:

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[Digitization Products & Services](#)  
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[Diversity & Inclusion Services](#)  
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- A Digital (R)evolution
- The Partisan Divide

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Stay tuned for more information! Check **[aam-us.org/events](https://aam-us.org/events)** this summer for details.

