

Museum Studies Network

MSN Conversation #3:

**Making the Future Museum We Want: Museum Studies in Conversation with Museums
Wednesday, October 28, 2-3:15 pm ET**

Topic: Open Calls to Transform Toxic Workplace Culture in Museums

Facilitated by Rosanna Flouty, Alexa Cummins, Sydney Yaeger, Will Neer, and Megan Villa

Session organized by Chelsea Haines, Jennifer Kingsley, and Juilee Decker, Museum Studies Network

This document provides a starting point for conversations about the role of open calls to museums and cultural institutions and the necessity to prepare students to encounter, negotiate, and understand these. Brief notes are below, with prominent, current examples listed below, along with relevant social media handles. These notes are the result of the conversations that took place across three break-out sessions.

This session focused on recent open calls to museums and cultural institutions to transform both their workplace conditions and program agendas. Alleging that senior staff at many institutions foster toxic work environments of racism, sexism, exclusion, and exploitation, museum workers have begun collectively organizing to articulate their demands for better pay, greater inclusivity, and safer and more equitable working conditions alongside creating museums that are more robustly diverse and explicitly antiracist in their programming. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these tensions, as many museum workers have been furloughed or laid off, and resistance to speaking up has faded in favor of demanding structural change in the museum. When senior level management have proved resistant, museum workers have gone public, publishing their demands through online outlets and social media.

Discussions in the breakout sessions examined recent case studies in the hope of training future museum workers how to effectively engage and navigate labor issues and workplace dynamics. Topics included recent efforts to unionize by a range of different museums as well as open calls lodged against institutions. Conversation also focused on how to emphasize emotional and collaborative skill-building in the museum studies curriculum, citing Dr. Marc Brackett's *Permission to Feel* as a potential resource.

Further Information/Selected Bibliography

"A Better Guggenheim," <https://abetterguggenheim.com/>.

Anania, Billy. "Art Museums in the U.S. Are Facing a Reckoning," *Jacobin*, October 25, 2020, <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/10/us-art-museums-workers-organizing-racism-unions>.

Brackett, Marc. *Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive* (New York: Celadon Books, 2019).

Cascone, Sarah. "The Tenement Museum's Union Filed a Complaint With the Labor Board After the Institution Laid Off 80 Percent of Unionized Staff," *Artnet News*, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/tenement-museum-union-files-unfair-labor-complaint-1898799>.

"Dismantle NOMA," <https://sites.google.com/view/dismantlenoma/collective-statement>

“FAQ: New Museum Union,” <https://newmuseumunion.org/faq>.

Morse, Eric. “Why Employees at the Philadelphia Museum of Art Are Unionizing,” *Art Museum Teaching*, 17 July, 2020, <https://artmuseumteaching.com/2020/07/17/why-employees-at-the-philadelphia-museum-of-art-are-unionizing/>.

Randle, Aaron. “‘We Were Tired of Asking’: Why Open Letters Have Become Many Activists’ Tool of Choice for Exposing Racism at Museums.” *Artnet News*, 15 July 2020, news.artnet.com/art-world/museum-open-letters-activism-1894150.

Wagley, Catherine. “Museum Workers Across the Country Are Unionizing. Here’s What’s Driving a Movement That’s Been Years in the Making,” *Artnet News*, November 25, 2019, <https://news.artnet.com/market/union-museum-analysis-1714716>.

Selected Instagram Accounts

@changethemuseum

@fairmuseumjobs

@changetheboard

@cancelartgalleries

@covidmuseumsanonymous

This document was posted in February 2021. If you have questions about this document, please contact MSN Programming Chair, Juilee Decker, jdgsh@rit.edu.