

INNOVATION  
INSPIRATION  
IDENTITY +  
IMPACT

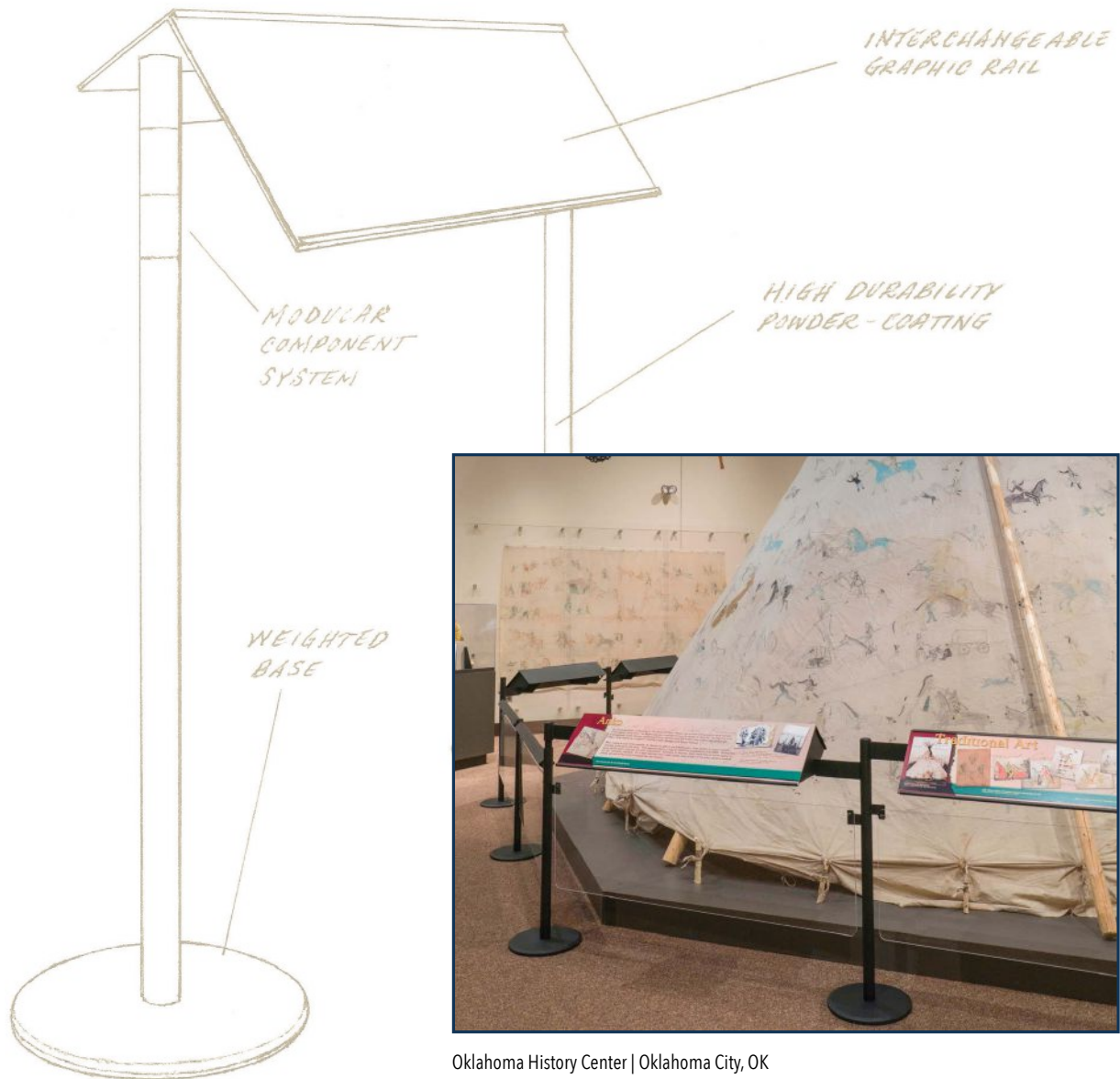
# MUSEUM

## A Redefining Moment





CUSTOM LOOK. MODULAR DESIGN.  
READY TO SHIP.



Oklahoma History Center | Oklahoma City, OK

MUSEUMRAILS™ is a refined system of modular rail components consisting of weighted bases and posts, support brackets, and a choice of easily changeable graphics panels. MuseumRails offers a custom appearance, yet is still flexible and easily reconfigurable. It is the perfect reusable solution to many exhibit requirements for interpretive rails and visitor separation.

[MUSEUMRAILS.COM](http://MUSEUMRAILS.COM)

800.862.9869



# Join us in celebrating these milestones for our Alliance!

ACCREDITATION  
IS CELEBRATING

50 YEARS  
OF MUSEUM  
EXCELLENCE

THE MUSEUM  
ASSESSMENT  
PROGRAM IS  
CELEBRATING

40 YEARS  
OF MUSEUM  
EXCELLENCE

We want to thank the 100,000+ museum professionals who have contributed their knowledge and expertise to the museum field by participating in a MAP or Accreditation Review at a museum, or serving as a Peer Reviewer or Accreditation Commissioner. Your commitment to museum excellence is what makes achieving these milestones possible!

---

Learn more by visiting:  
[aam-us.org/accreditation-excellence](http://aam-us.org/accreditation-excellence)

We also thank the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for generously funding the Museum Assessment Program (MAP) since its inception.



American  
Alliance of  
Museums

NOVEMBER  
DECEMBER  
2021  
ISSUE

# CONTENTS



## FEATURES

- 20** Beyond the Museum Walls  
The Queens Museum serves as a community anchor by embracing porosity, situated-ness, and uncertainty.  
By Heryte T. Tequame
- 26** Recasting the Civic Imperative of the Museum  
Liberating collections from their imperialist pasts can occur through a new model: the museum-university.  
By Clémentine Deliss
- 32** Pushing the Boundaries  
The Whitney Plantation Museum confronts the truth of its history in all facets of its operations.  
By Ashley Rogers
- 37** A Global View  
AAM-Getty International Program alumni reflect on the redefinition of museum.

Cover: Clive Watts/Alamy  
Stock Photo



## DEPARTMENTS

- 5** From the President and CEO
- 6** By the Numbers
- 8** First Look
- 12** Point of View  
**Museums Must Be More**
- 16** Point of View  
**A Better Future for Museums**
- 50** Alliance in Action
- 54** Tributes and Transitions
- 56** Reflection







Scan QR Code  
to watch the  
ZOOM YouTube Video

<b>ZOOM</b>	<b>ADJUSTABLE SPOTLIGHT</b>	<b>120/277V</b>
	Beam Angles From 5° to 50°	Up To 25,000 CBCP
	3 1/4" Diameter, 5" - 6 1/2" Length	COB, 19 Watts, 1856 Lumens
<p>The ZOOM Series is a compact spotlight designed with a locking lens grip to adjust the beam spread from a 5 degree narrow spot to a 50 degree flood. Powered by COB LED technology, the ZOOM Series has exceptional narrow field beam performance up to 25,000 CBCP from just 19 watts.</p>		
<p><b>Lighting Services Inc</b> The premier specialty lighting manufacturer.</p>		





# MUSEUM

A BENEFIT OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS

## EDITOR IN CHIEF

Dean Phelus

## MANAGING EDITOR

Gayle Bennett

## CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Bob Beatty, Ember Farber, Julie Hart, Natanya Khashan, Megan Lantz, Barry Szczesny, Cecelia Walls

## DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Team of Creatives, LLC

## ADVERTISING

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

## ALLIANCE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Laura L. Lott

## ALLIANCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### OFFICERS

*Chair (2020–2022)*

**Chevy Humphrey**, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago

*Treasurer (2021–2022)*

**Jorge Zamanillo**, HistoryMiami Museum

*Immediate Past Chair (2020–2022)*

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

**Frederic Bertley**, Center of Science and Industry

**Alison Rempel Brown**, Science Museum of Minnesota

**Christine A. Donovan**, Northern Trust Company

**Charles L. Katzenmeyer**, Field Museum

### TERM OF OFFICE 2021–2024

**Dina Bailey**, Mountain Top Vision

**Carole Charnow**, Boston Children's Museum

**Ann Friedman**, Planet Word

**Linda Harrison**, The Newark Museum of Art

**Julissa Marengo**, Smithsonian Institution

**Nathan Richie**, Golden History Museum & Park

**Karol Wight**, Corning Museum of Glass

### TERM OF OFFICE 2019–2022

**Robert M. Davis**, America's Black Holocaust Museum

**Marcia DeWitt**, Hillwood Estate, Museum and Garden

**Kelly McKinley**, Bay Area Discovery Museum

**James Pepper Henry**, First Americans Museum

**Julie Stein**, Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture

### TERM OF OFFICE 2020–2023

**Devon Akmon**, Michigan State University Museum and Science Gallery

**Carrie Rebora Barratt**, Crystal Bridges Museum of Art

MUSEUM (ISSN 0027-4089)

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021, VOLUME 100, NO. 6

PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY (J/F, M/A, M/J, J/A, S/O, N/D)

BY THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS

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

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



twitter.com/aamers



facebook.com/americanmuseums



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



instagram.com/aamersofficial

## Thanks to our Member Discount Providers



HUNTINGTON T. BLOCK  
INSURANCE AGENCY, INC.







# Adapting to Community Needs

**Distrust and skepticism** in many of our country's institutions is increasing, making the fragility of trust painfully clear. Despite this, museums continue to be the most trusted sources of information in the US. The responsibility that comes with holding this level of trust is paramount, but what does that mean for museums and how can we honor the trust the public holds in us?

Over the course of the pandemic, museum professionals across the country have been demonstrating through their work the very reasons that our communities' trust in our institutions is well placed. Examples of museums rapidly shifting to become responsive to their communities were countless. You rose to the occasion by providing virtual education, donating PPE, encouraging civic engagement and voting, combating disinformation, providing space for respite, educating the public about COVID-19 and vaccines, and so much more. You transformed your museums to be adaptive to community needs by also serving as schools, warming shelters, food banks, and ballot drop-off and vaccination sites. This is the power of museums when we engage deeply with our broad communities and find ways to meet their needs.

When the pandemic finally reaches our rearview mirror, we know museums will play instrumental roles in helping their communities heal and in preserving the stories and lessons learned from this time. But do not forget how unbelievably creative you have been with your spaces and resources during one of our world's greatest crises. These mission-centric ways of serving our communities should continue to guide us in responsibly harboring our communities' trust. How can we continue to innovate, transform, and adapt to the needs and wants of all our publics? How can we share and celebrate all of our stories? And, critically, how can we measure the impact of our work to not

only evolve but continue to make the case for the invaluable role museums play in society?

The pandemic not only taught us the fragility of trust, it also shed light on the vulnerability of our structures and systems. Knowing the difference you make in the lives of your community members, and quantifying that difference, offers new roles for your museum to play in public life and the financial security that accompanies being considered vital, essential, and *relevant*.

In 2022, I am challenging you to continue the momentum created by this crisis—to adapt to meet the needs of your communities and not only serve as a public asset, but also make clear that your museum is an indispensable part of your community. As your Alliance, we will continue to champion the vital roles of museums with decision makers. We will continue to provide our museum community with the tools, resources, and inspiration you need to further these conversations and strategies. In this issue of *Museum*, you can find inspiration from museum professionals engaging in this work and planning for an increasingly vibrant future informed and enriched by thriving museums.

9/15/21



---

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

# Museums and Trust

**6.4**

Average trustworthiness score museums earn from American adults (on a 0–10 scale where 10 = “very trustworthy”).

**6x**

American adults are six times more likely to explicitly say they trust museums than distrust museums.

**Only 27%** of people think it is never appropriate for museums to suggest or recommend behaviors or actions to the public.

Sources: Museums and Trust: 2021 broader population research fielded by AAM and Wilkening Consulting

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





Mercury MR-2, Gemini 11 and Apollo ASTP capsules, California Science Center, Los Angeles. On loan from the Smithsonian Institution.

## HAHN MUSEUM DISPLAY CASES

WORLDWIDE LEADERSHIP IN PRESERVATION & PRECISION

- MicroClimate Conditioning
- HAHN Pure Conservation
- Advanced Lighting Systems
- HAHN Nitrogen Case
- Security Systems
- HLS Modular Case

 **BAM** Certified and under surveillance  
Certification N°: BAM/ZBF/017/12

The BAM certificate refers only to the low-emission materials used according to the BEMMA scheme for being processed at the display case manufacturer.



### California Science Center

The new permanent exhibition “Life! Beginnings” celebrates life’s incredible ability to make more life. Discover how humans and all living creatures reproduce, develop, and pass on their genes to bring new life into the world. Visitors can perform a mating dance with other animals, build a baby pigeon by mixing and matching its parents’ genes, practice different parenting strategies from the animal kingdom, and more.

**Location:** Los Angeles, CA

**Learn more:**  
[californiasciencecenter.org/exhibits/life-beginnings](http://californiasciencecenter.org/exhibits/life-beginnings)

### The Rockwell Museum

In August, The Rockwell Museum hosted a ribbon cutting for the 2021 Alley Art Project: *Life in a Tapestry*, a new mural in Corning, New York. The Alley Art Project embraces start-to-finish, project-based learning initiatives. This year, students worked with teaching mural artist Betsy Z. Casañas to design and paint a mural inspired by Diné (Navajo) textiles in The Rockwell’s collection. Rockwell educators led mural design classes with students and Casañas through a mix of socially distanced in-person and video classes.

**Location:** Corning, NY

**Learn more:** [rockwellmuseum.org/blog/life-in-a-tapestry/](http://rockwellmuseum.org/blog/life-in-a-tapestry/)

### San Bernardino County Museum

The Joshua Tree Highlands Artist Residency 15-year anniversary celebration exhibition showcases 35 artworks completed during the residency. The artists selected are at all stages of their careers and work in all media, including drawing, painting, photography, film, video, new media, installation, fiction and nonfiction writing, interdisciplinary, social practice, and architecture.

**Location:** Redlands, CA

**Dates:** through Jan. 3, 2022

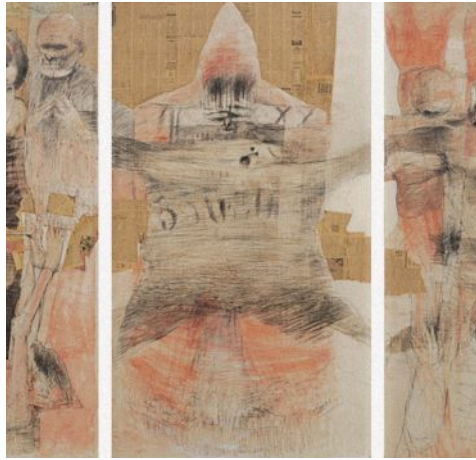
**Learn more:** [sbcounty.gov/museum/](http://sbcounty.gov/museum/)

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

Courtesy of the California Science Center; photograph by Lee Speary, 2021; Kyle Riede





Mauricio Lasansky, *Triptych*, 1963–71, “The Nazi Drawings,” 1963–71, “The Nazi Drawings,” Levitt Foundation © Lasansky Corporation; Roto; Missouri History Museum

## Minneapolis Institute of Art

“Envisioning Evil: ‘The Nazi Drawings’ by Mauricio Lasansky” includes the entirety of Lasansky’s 33 large-scale drawings—his monumental, profoundly moving response to the horrors of the Holocaust—50 years after their debut. The exhibition is the first public showing of “The Nazi Drawings” since undergoing a major conservation.

**Location:** Minneapolis, MN

**Dates:** through June 26, 2022

**Learn more:** [new.artsmia.org/exhibition/envisioning-evil-the-nazi-drawings-by-mauricio-lasansky](http://new.artsmia.org/exhibition/envisioning-evil-the-nazi-drawings-by-mauricio-lasansky)

## National Museum of Military Vehicles

The new 40,000-square-foot Puller Gallery at the recently opened National Museum of Military Vehicles reimagines the traditional military museum by immersing visitors in the stories of Vietnam and Korean War service members through dynamic, interactive experiences. Officially opened on Memorial Day, 2021, the museum is home to 475 fully restored military vehicles, artillery pieces, naval vessels, and aircraft with a focus on the American experience in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

**Location:** Dubois, WY

**Learn more:** [nmmv.org](http://nmmv.org)

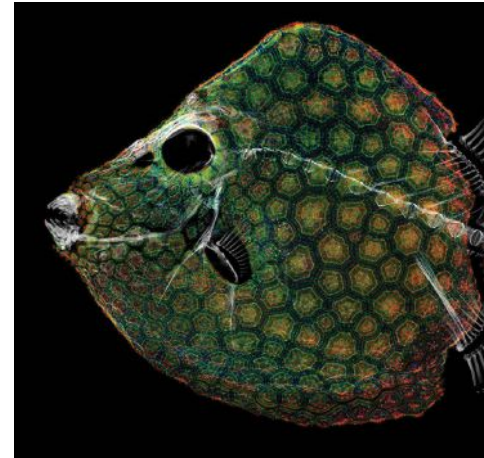
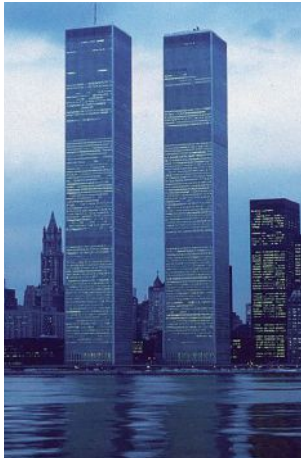
## Missouri History Museum

St. Louis, Missouri, is often missing from lists of America’s major music cities, but it shouldn’t be. “St. Louis Sound,” a 6,000-square-foot, 200-artifact exhibition makes the argument that St. Louis is vital to the story of popular music in America. The origins of America’s first four pop music genres—ragtime, the blues, jazz, and hillbilly (country)—can all be traced to St. Louis.

**Location:** St. Louis, MO

**Dates:** through Jan. 22, 2023

**Learn more:** [mohistory.org/mediaroom/st-louis-sound](http://mohistory.org/mediaroom/st-louis-sound)



### Muscarella Museum of Art

“Forever Marked by the Day” commemorates the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks by examining the making and remaking of the World Trade Center site in lower Manhattan through the lens of architecture. The exhibition emphasizes the country’s collective creativity and resilience and features the original towers by Minoru Yamasaki as well as the projects of the group of architects involved in the remaking of Ground Zero, including Michael Arad, Daniel Libeskind, David Childs, and Santiago Calatrava.

**Location:** Williamsburg, VA  
**Dates:** through Jan. 9, 2022  
**Learn more:** [muscarelle.wm.edu/exhibition\\_record/forever-marked-by-the-day/](http://muscarelle.wm.edu/exhibition_record/forever-marked-by-the-day/)

### San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles

“Layered & Stitched: 50 Years of Innovative Art,” by Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA), is a showcase of 50 art quilts by renowned master artists around the globe. Seminal works show the evolution of the art quilt from the earliest pioneers to contemporary artists experimenting with new forms, materials, and digital technologies. This exhibition traces the development of this art form as it started with isolated makers, primarily in Ohio and California, into an international movement involving thousands of artists.

**Location:** San Jose, CA  
**Dates:** through Jan. 2, 2022  
**Partner:** Studio Art Quilt Associates  
**Learn more:** [sjquiltmuseum.org/current-exhibitions](http://sjquiltmuseum.org/current-exhibitions)

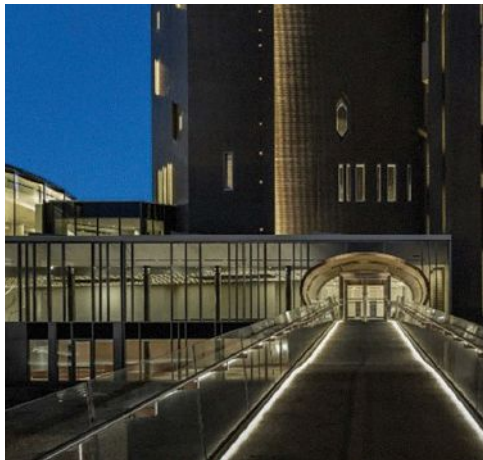
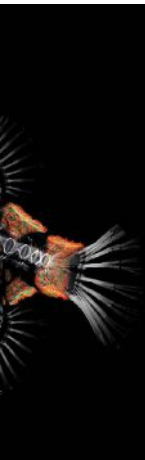
### Florida Museum of Natural History

The openVertebrate project (oVert), led by the Florida Museum of Natural History, is a collaborative initiative to CT scan thousands of animal specimens from museums across the US. More than a dozen of these scans, along with cleared and stained specimens, are on display in the new “Inner Beauty” gallery exhibition at the museum, depicting the beauty and artistic wonders of modern preservation science.

**Location:** Gainesville, FL  
**Dates:** through Dec. 31  
**Learn more:** [floridamuseum.ufl.edu/exhibits/inner-beauty](http://floridamuseum.ufl.edu/exhibits/inner-beauty)

Balthazar Korab, courtesy of the Library of Congress; Fumiko Nakayama, *Geometric* (detail), 2011; image by Zach Randall, Florida Museum of Natural History





Renderings from Ya La'ford; photo by James Florio; Mary Sibande, *Right Now!*, 2015, courtesy of the artist and SWAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa © Mary Sibande

## St. Petersburg Museum of History

The St. Petersburg Museum of History is expected to break ground on the addition of a new floor and rooftop deck wrapped in a public art piece on February 11, 2022—its 100th birthday. Ya La'ford, a St. Petersburg and Bay Area muralist, installation artist, painter, and professor, will be the official artist behind the museum's final expansion piece, *Intersections*, which will wrap the second-level and rooftop terrace exterior of the upcoming expansion.

**Location:** St. Petersburg, FL

**Learn more:** [stpetecatalyst.com/ya-lafor-to-create-public-art-for-history-museum-expansion/](http://stpetecatalyst.com/ya-lafor-to-create-public-art-for-history-museum-expansion/)

## Denver Art Museum

The Denver Art Museum reopened its expanded and reimagined campus to the public with a free general admission day on October 24, unveiling all eight levels of its iconic Gio Ponti–designed Lanny and Sharon Martin Building (formerly referred to as the North or Ponti Building) and the new Anna and John J. Sie Welcome Center.

**Location:** Denver, CO

**Learn more:** [denverartmuseum.org/en/martin-building-project](http://denverartmuseum.org/en/martin-building-project)

## Frist Art Museum

Using hyper-realistic sculptures and photographs, Johannesburg-based artist Mary Sibande deconstructs the roles of women in South Africa as both individuals and in terms of race, gender, and class inequity in “Mary Sibande: Blue Purple Red.” Sibande’s central character, Sophie, has been cast from her own face and body, and this avatar wears different colors to reflect periods of South Africa’s political history.

**Location:** Nashville, TN

**Dates:** through Jan. 2, 2022

**Learn more:** [fristartmuseum.org/exhibition/mary-sibande/](http://fristartmuseum.org/exhibition/mary-sibande/)



# Museums Must Be More

ICOM's definition of "museum" needs to take into account how the practice has changed and where it is heading.

By W. Richard West Jr.

**For the past two years** in the global museum community, one issue has generated an immense volume of discussion and associated passion: the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) definition of

"museum," adopted in 2007, and whether it needs to be altered or should remain the same.

The current provision is the following: "A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its

development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment."



The "Our Universes" exhibition was part of the 2004 opening suite of core installations at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC.

Photo by National Museum of the American Indian staff © Smithsonian Institution



The descendancy of museums, from their origins in Western Europe and subsequent history in the United States, is clear. They are the direct offspring of the European Enlightenment and Western rationalism, defined by the binary division of “culture” on the one hand and “nature” on the other, with the collateral creation of disciplinary subdivisions that have been with us for literally centuries.

Apart from the wellsprings of its substantive beginnings, the definition seems quite “internal” and “internalized.” Yes, reference is made to being in the “service of society,” and hopefully it “communicates and exhibits” to the public for its “education, study, and enjoyment.” But even within the words of the definition, let alone a century and a half of museum practice, the operating assumption undergirding the “knowledge” and “content” to be addressed is that it occurs inside the museum and is to be communicated unilaterally to the public—the originating and long-standing vision of the museum as the “temple on the hill.”

Let me cite a contrasting vision. The words, stated in 1990, belong to then-Secretary Robert McCormick Adams, head of the Smithsonian, about the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI):

This is [a] ... national museum that takes ... the authenticity ... the vitality ... and the self-determination of the Native American voices ... as the fundamental reality ... it must represent. ...

[W]e move decisively from the older image of a museum as a temple with its superior, self-governing priesthood ... to a forum ... committed not to the promulgation of received wisdom but to the encouragement of a multicultural dialogue.

His words were museum specific. But Secretary Adams’ comments and their relevance went far beyond the NMAI, and my observations here do, too. Indeed, they reflect the motivating factors and results of the vast changes in museology and museum practice as the 20th century has become the 21st.

### What Are These Changes?

Turning first to the “what,” a pivot to the historical and societal context is helpful. What happened in the museum community was linked to, and then in turn reflected, the “multiculturalism movement” in the United States that occurred during the late 1980s and 1990s. In that era, marginalized cultural communities, frequently minority and of color, challenged—often successfully—their continued marginalization. They strove to become recognized and respected threads in the fabric of America’s cultural tapestry. The movement evolved in various forms and affected an array of existing institutions, social, political, and economic.

In the museum community, it manifested itself in the promotion of the “ethnic-specific museum” as an alternative to the reluctance,

historically, of many mainstream and encyclopedic museums to address the misrepresentation of marginalized communities with consistency and diligence. At inception, the NMAI was an example of this museum typology. The first prong of its maiden mission statement was the invocation in interpretation and representation of first-person Native voice as expert and authoritative—in addition to other sources of third-party curation, which had been the historical norm and practice.

The entire 2004 opening suite of core installations at the NMAI’s principal public facility on the National Mall in Washington, DC—“Our Universes,” “Our Peoples,” and “Our Lives”—was driven by this interpretive approach and methodology. At the time it was recognized as highly innovative museology, and in the same breath often subjected to withering critiques as the anti-intellectual product of unlettered curators who sat beyond the walls of the temple.

Over time, this interpretive deconstruction of old paradigms and the reconstruction of new ones vaulted the walls of ethnic-specific institutions and began permeating encyclopedic museums of all typologies. The Autry Museum of the American West’s 2017 exhibition, “La Raza,” is an exemplar. It addressed one of the most tumultuous periods in the civil rights history of the Chicano/Chicana community in Los Angeles from 1967–1977 through the lens of the photographers employed by the legendary publication of the same



Visitors to the Autry Museum of the American West at the “La Raza” exhibition about the civil rights history of the Chicano/Chicana community in Los Angeles from 1967-1977.

name. The show was co-curated by the Autry’s chief curator and Luiz Garza, who was a *La Raza* photographer and remains a prominent member of the Latinx community in contemporary Los Angeles.

The Autry lens is “intercultural” as well as “multicultural.” The exhibition “Empire and Liberty” addressed, to the surprise of many visitors, America’s Civil War and its considerable impact on the American West. There the cultural voices were multiple and often first person: white, Native, Chinese American, and others. Many different stories and perspectives were presented, all of them authentic, all of them based upon authoritative and multiple voices.

### Why Are These Changes Occurring?

The “why” of the interpretive practice I have just described is as important, or more so, than the “what.” The premise is simple yet complex: on a global basis not all systems of knowledge descend neatly and categorically, as historically most museums in Europe and the United States do, from the Enlightenment and Western rationalism. Indeed, based on a global

perspective, very few do.

New Zealand academics Penny Allan and Huhana Smith emphasize this point with respect to the Maori community in New Zealand in an article they wrote for *MAI Journal*: “. . . importantly a . . . Maori approach to science is not based on the dualistic assumptions of a Western science epistemology. The distinctions or separation between professional scientist and non-scientific stakeholder, theory and practice, subject and object, start and finish, past and present are subsumed by a holistic approach that considers a whole-of-person, and a whole-of-system theory of knowing.”

Thus, the inclusive engagement of curatorial “voice,” especially the first-person voice, with respect to knowledge systems that fall outside the realm of Western thought is more than a gratuitous political gesture. To the contrary, if museums are to communicate knowledge most fulsomely, completely, and accurately, that inclusion is essential.

### A Transformation Ongoing

The foregoing “what” and “why” of my discussion segue into the final component of my argument

regarding museum definitions—namely, the impact of what I have already addressed on the very fundamentals of museology and museum practice in the 21st century. In a sentence: the times have changed, and museum definitions need to adapt, not to the exclusion of all that has been but to the inclusion of what might also be in the future. The popular, conventional, and historical public perception of museums as principally worthy cultural destinations to visit occasionally needs to be altered, in definition and practice, in the name of sound epistemological practice, social relevance, and broader public connection and impact. In short, the 21st century museum can and should be far more than a stop on the tour bus route.

I return to Secretary Adams’ declaration for support of this proposition. His, for its time, was a material recasting of museology, museum practice, and conventional interpretive curatorial and interpretive methodology: the demise of the temple on the hill with its self-appointed priesthood, the explicit invocation and affirmation of first-person and multiple curatorial voices and their authority, the recognition and endorsement of distinctive and differing knowledge systems and their validity.

All of the foregoing turned conventional museology and museum practice on its head, from top-down to bottom-up, inside-out to outside-in, bilateralism instead of unilateralism, dialogue instead of monologue. That wholesale transformation in approach is



seminal and has direct impact on the very nature of the museum as a community-connected, multi-vocal gathering space and place of broader civic and societal import “committed not to the promulgation of received wisdom but to the encouragement of a multicultural dialogue.”

If the era of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter has taught us nothing else, surely it has demonstrated that currently in the United States—and we are hardly alone—we struggle to find and implement civic and social space. We desperately need gathering places for discussion, discourse, debate, even controversy; forums and safe

places for unsafe ideas concerning cultural history and human experience, past and present. As defined and described above, museums can serve as a notable and valuable link in that contemporary armor of political and social polarities and the disabling cultural and historical gloom they engender.

The museum as counterpoint, although not able to do everything, can do something—and a very important something. That hope should be the social, museological, and institutional aspiration of all museums and how they define themselves and their future in the 21st century. Museum definitions that fail to consider

and, indeed, embrace a future of continuing societal relevance and impact put museums at risk of becoming public institutions diminished and distant in history’s rearview mirror.

**W. Richard West Jr.** is the president and CEO emeritus and ambassador, Native community, of the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles, California, and the founding director and director emeritus of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC.



M&LF<sup>®</sup>

THE MUSEUM STOOL<sup>®</sup> A classic, in use in dozens of esteemed institutions

MandLF.com

Photo © Alan Karchmer



# A Better Future for Museums

The need for a human-centered approach to museum practice has never been more urgent.

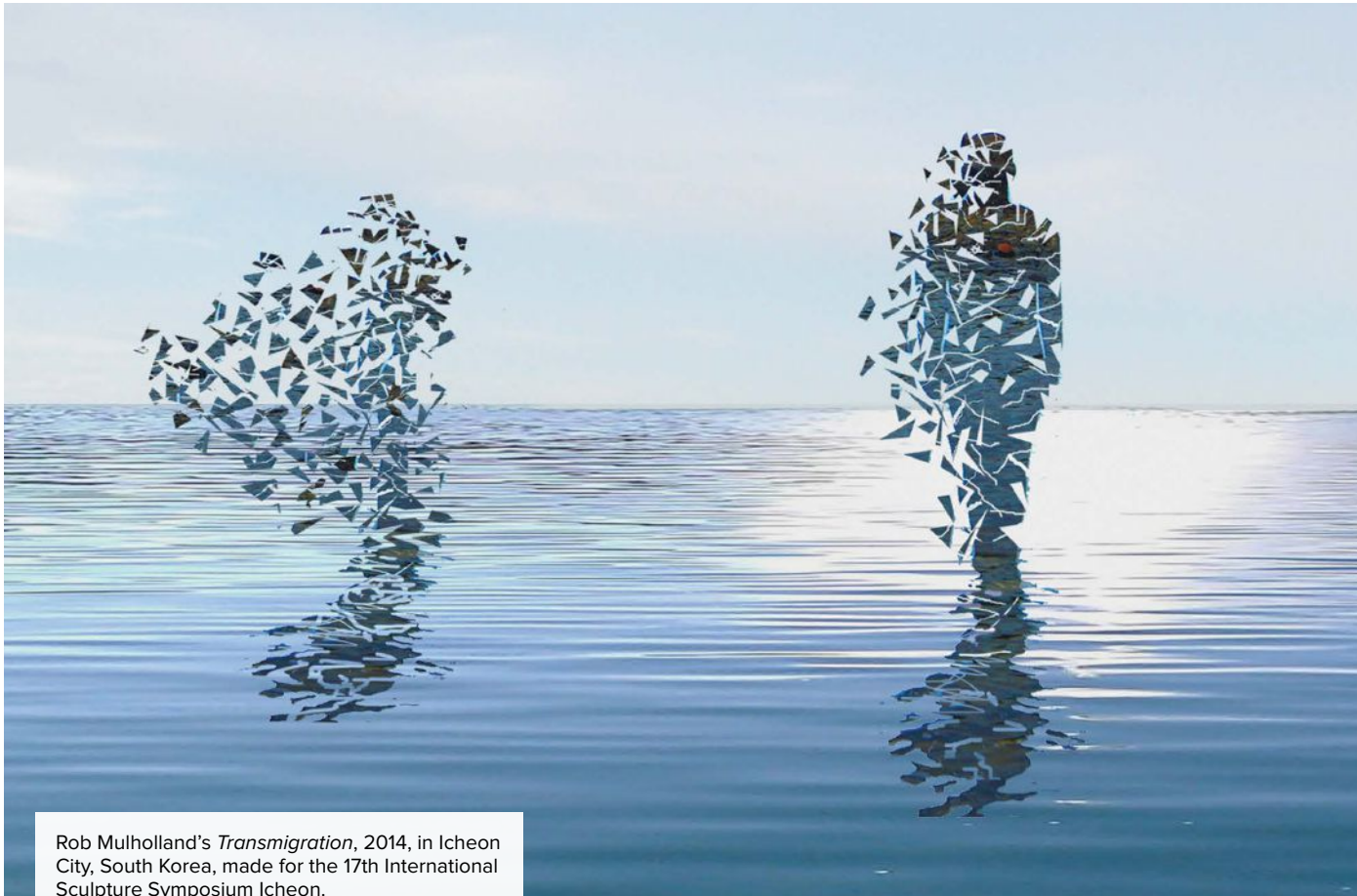
By Mike Murawski

**My own passion for change** in museums comes from a place of love that has grown over the past two decades through countless experiences of togetherness, connection, pain, sharing, learning, and

healing—both within and outside the walls of these institutions. I've worked with museum professionals and community leaders to advance a more human-centered approach and push institutions beyond being just a collection

of objects. I've seen museums be places where people learn from each other, see their lives from a completely new perspective, and come together to heal.

Museums all across the country are working to be agents



Rob Mulholland's *Transmigration*, 2014, in Icheon City, South Korea, made for the 17th International Sculpture Symposium Icheon.



of positive change in their local communities and beyond. It is essential to recognize that becoming an agent of change does not happen because of a single program or social media post, and it certainly does not happen with just one person. The transformation happening right now at so many museums is the result of the passionate dedication of staff across departments as well as rapidly growing networks of community partners.

This work involves an enormous amount of listening, developing trust, and building

relationships—both within a museum as well as with audiences and communities. It involves growing a community of change and advocacy from within and embracing a human-centered mindset in everything an institution does.

As common sense and straightforward as it sounds to think about museums as people- and human-centered institutions, this idea has faced a legacy of rather fierce opposition grounded in outdated traditions and histories. For example, consider the following questions:

- How many museums still have mission statements that prioritize collecting and preserving objects rather than forefronting the people-centered work of building community, growing empathy and understanding, celebrating human creativity, and cultivating engaged citizenship?
- How often do museum leaders and boards make decisions that value objects and collections over staff, volunteers, and museum visitors? (We have certainly seen this happen during the pandemic through targeted budget cuts and staff layoffs.)
- What if those in positions of power and authority considered human relationships and human impact first and foremost when making decisions

about exhibitions, interpretation, programs, facilities, policies, and practices?

- What if the core values of an institution reflected the core values held by its staff?

As the US continues to grapple with the pandemic and social injustice, the need for a human-centered approach to museums has never been more urgent.

### Becoming More Human-Centered

At its foundation, being a more human-centered museum involves shaping and productively debating a set of core values that reflect a commitment to equity, justice, and human rights. When we put people first—above collections, above endowments, above budget spreadsheets—we are making a commitment to advance compassion, care, human potential, and collective well-being as integral elements to our institution's values and culture.

This process begins with each of us, as individuals, taking the time to look inward and engage in a deeper form of self-inquiry. What matters most to us? What are the ideas and people that have shaped our core values? How are these values reflected in the work we do within our institution?

Through facilitating workshops and talking with museum leaders during the past year, I have learned how common it is for people to skip this step. We're so anxious to jump into the work of making change happen that we don't take the necessary time to understand



Rob Mulholland



who we are, where our beliefs come from, and what is motivating our desire for change.

Community organizer and activist Grace Lee Boggs wonderfully wrote, “Transform yourself to transform the world.” So the first step may be recognizing the change we need to make within ourselves. Our own life and work can be the first place we start practicing a more human-centered approach.

In his book *Moving Icebergs: Leading People to Lasting Change*, Steve Patty argues that in order to create lasting change within an organization, we need to dive below the surface to engage our deeper values and beliefs. “Every organization,” he writes, “needs to hold candid conversations about values and beliefs, purpose and meaning.” Too often, the institutional culture of museums—as

well as that of many nonprofits, businesses, and corporations—undervalues these more personal conversations and the vulnerability required to connect with each other in deeply human ways. We avoid talking with each other about our personal core values because it’s “too personal” and best left to private reflection outside the workplace.

Being a more human-centered museum, however, means creating an environment where we can all be more human with each other, understand each others’ beliefs and convictions, build trust, and treat each other with care, respect, and dignity (especially in the face of crisis). This requires rethinking an organization’s hierarchy, developing a shared sense of leadership, and engaging in equity across every aspect of the organization. To bring a human-centered

approach into museums, we need to question everything and leave the status quo mindset in the past.

### An Opportunity for Change

The challenges of our time have given us the perfect opportunity to radically rethink museums and create a path forward that is deeply grounded in care, kindness, courage, patience, resilience, and love. I’ve seen these values practiced by activists and change-makers across our field, yet so many institutions are still holding on to outdated power structures, oppressive legacies, and harmful dominant cultures.

As we move forward through this painful moment, we must reflect inward as individuals and develop a strong grounding, a North Star. Let’s take the time to ask ourselves who we are and how we want to bring our truest and

## PRACTICING SELF-INQUIRY

Self-inquiry is crucial to making institutional change, and it requires work. Spend time asking yourself these questions. Then share them with others and begin larger conversations with colleagues in your department and across your institution.

- Above all else, what matters most to me?
- What are some ideas, people, and communities that have shaped my core values and beliefs?
- Is my current institution aligned with my own personal values and commitments?
- If my institution could create an environment based on deeper human values, what would that look like? What changes would need to happen?
- How can I bravely and consistently align my practice with my core values?

fullest selves into the collective work of transforming museums and into our human responsibility to change our institutions.

I know what museums look and feel like when they begin to live up to their full potential as open-hearted spaces of care, humanity, and love. My demands for change are rooted

in these experiences. Museums everywhere have the potential to take action, dismantle systems of oppression, build a more equitable future, and be those places that bring people together and change people's lives.

A different future is possible, and it is up to us to make this happen together.

**Mike Murawski** is a museum consultant, co-producer of *Museums Are Not Neutral*, and author of *Museums as Agents of Change*, recently published by AAM.

## RESOURCES

adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, 2017

Mike Murawski, *Museums as Agents of Change: A Guide to Becoming a Changemaker*, 2021

Mohammad Anwar, Frank Danna, Jeffrey Ma, and Christopher Pitre, *Love as a Business Strategy: Resilience, Belonging, and Success*, 2021

Steve Patty, *Moving Icebergs: Leading People to Lasting Change*, 2012

Jerry Colonna, *Reboot: Leadership and the Art of Growing Up*, 2019

# #AAM2022 STARTS WITH YOU



## 2022 Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo

May 19–22 | Boston

After a time of unprecedented losses and disruptions, one thing remains true: there is unparalleled power in being together in person. To stay up-to-date on new details about #AAM2022 and registration, follow us on social media and bookmark [annualmeeting.aam-us.org](https://annualmeeting.aam-us.org).



# Beyond The Museum Walls

The Queens Museum serves as a community anchor by embracing porosity, situatedness, and uncertainty.

By Heryte T. Tequame

Photo by Max Touhey, courtesy of the Queens Museum



Manhattan on *The Panorama of the City of New York* at the Queens Museum.







At left: A sound bath organized for La Jornada Food Pantry volunteers in the Queens Museum atrium is led by Year of Uncertainty Co-Thinker Guadalupe Maravilla in August 2021.

At right: BordeAndo, a crochet and embroidery collective and Year of Uncertainty (YoU) community partner, facilitates a ribbon weaving workshop during the YoU Summer Community Camp in July 2021.

**When the first wave of the pandemic hit** New York City in early 2020, the Queens Museum found itself at the epicenter of both the city and the nation's COVID-19 crisis. Flushing and Corona, two largely immigrant neighborhoods bordering the museum's home base—Flushing Meadows–Corona Park—were experiencing the highest death rates in the United States.

When the museum closed its doors to the public on March 13, 2020, Queens hadn't yet reached the apex of COVID-19 hospitalizations. As a borough, country, and global community, we were not yet fully able to process the severity of this health emergency.

I stepped into my role at the Queens Museum only a few weeks before our physical space became inaccessible to visitors, employees, artists, and programming partners. As our team anxiously entered a nebulous period of remote work, we were faced with the following question: How could we use our resources and relationships to address the urgent needs of our diverse communities? For me, as a newcomer to the institution, this question seemed grounded in an



even larger issue: What's a Queens Museum without a building?

### Preserving Hyper-Local Histories

The New York City Building—the museum building's official name—existed decades before the idea of a borough museum in Flushing Meadows–Corona Park formed. Robert Moses, the notoriously multi-hyphenated New York planner-politician-architect, conceived the building to house the New York City Pavilion throughout the 1939–40 World's Fair. From 1946 to 1950, the New York City Building hosted the General Assembly of the United Nations, where a number of important decisions, including the partition of Palestine and the creation of UNICEF, were made. For the 1964–65 World's Fair, the New York City Building reclaimed its initial title as the New York City Pavilion and became the permanent headquarters of the *Panorama of the City of New York*: a 9,335-square-foot architectural model of the city designed by Moses.

In 1972, the New York City Building took on its current title: the Queens Museum (or as it was then known, the Queens County Art and Cultural Center). Occupying the only remaining pavilion from both World's Fairs allows the Queens Museum to embrace its role as a preserver, disseminator, and mediator of hyper-local history.

Courtesy of the Queens Museum; photo by Neil Constantine, courtesy of the Queens Museum



## Bringing the Outside In

Fast forward to spring 2020 and the Queens Museum is an empty museum building at the center of a COVID-19 hot spot. Rising infection rates, combined with sudden loss of employment and limited access to government assistance, left families across Corona and Flushing struggling with food security. While food pantries in Flushing continued to operate throughout the lockdown, these distribution centers were unequipped to serve the influx of individuals coming from Corona.

When Pedro Rodriguez, founder of Flushing's La Jornada food pantry, approached Gianina Enriquez, the Queens Museum's community organizer, with the idea of launching a food pantry for Corona residents, we responded by leveraging a major resource: our building. Initially managed in collaboration with Together We Can Community Resource Center, the La Jornada Food Pantry at the Queens Museum began operating in June 2020, and with the support of more than 70 volunteers from within the immediate community, it has distributed fresh and nonperishable food items to Corona residents. A year later, partnerships with local organizations like Commonpoint Queens and Elmhurst Corona Recovery Collaborative have enabled us to continue serving an average 600 families per week—90,000 total by the end of August.

Making our building available to La Jornada is rooted in a long legacy of creating opportunities for community members to use the museum as an extension of their organizing and programming space. For example, our Community Partnership Gallery is dedicated to presenting short-term exhibitions by local cultural and other nonprofit groups, and our holiday events have been tailored to neighboring immigrant cultures, working with the New York Chinese Cultural Center for Lunar New Year and Flushing's Hindu Temple Society of North America for a Holi festival. Adopting this localized approach to public engagement means centering the needs, desires, and experiences of those living closest to the museum.

During the pandemic, the Queens Museum has also been able to leverage other internal resources to help community members remain resilient. Our "Hecho Local" (Spanish for "locally made") product development series invited aspiring artisans and

craftspeople to participate in an eight-week workshop led by Christine Jeanjaquet, manager of the museum's gift shop, The August Tree. Geared toward Spanish-speaking makers based in Queens, this free online series guided participants on how to develop a new product line for income. In addition to strengthening their entrepreneurial skills, "Hecho Local" gave these Queens creatives access to industry-grade equipment with the help of the creative reuse center Materials for the Arts and offered them an opportunity to generate revenue by selling new products through our shop.

"Queens Spotlight" is another example of how we used our immediate resources to empower the work of community members. Launched in April 2020, this online interview series highlighted local COVID-19 relief efforts while honoring the resourcefulness and

Top: Construction of the New York City Building for the 1939–40 New York World's Fair.

Bottom: ¡Oye Corona! is a free monthly cultural celebration of art, music, and exercise in Corona Plaza, Queens.





Gabo Camnitzer, Year of Uncertainty (YoU) artist-in-residence, leads a collective drawing session with YoU Summer Community Camp participants in July 2021.

responsiveness of their leaders. At a time when digital channels were the primary connection with the public, “Queens Spotlight” allowed organizers to amplify the essential information they were eager to share throughout the Queens community.

### Bringing the Inside Out

One key lesson I’ve absorbed during my time at the Queens Museum is that bringing the outside in only reaches its full potential when the opposite also occurs: bringing the inside out. Therefore, moving beyond the museum walls has become a core institutional praxis.

Corona Plaza is an exciting example of the Queens Museum’s commitment to decentralizing community engagement. The plaza has been the main site for many of the museum’s public art projects and community festivals and our parks and public space advocacy work.

For years, Corona Plaza was a small, one-block street riddled with parking and trash collection issues. Museum efforts generated a network of local

business owners and community leaders who regularly partnered on health initiatives, street fairs, and beautification efforts. When the city turned the street into a public plaza in summer 2012, we began hosting an ambitious suite of public programs in the plaza, including *Corónate*, a cultural festival organized in partnership with local folkloric performers, artists, and social practitioners.

We have also made our values visible outside the museum by partnering for the last 10 years with Queens College, City University of New York to support early career, socially engaged artists. Social Practice Queens is a unique degree program focused on the intersection of art and social justice that aims to initiate real-world change through practices of care, social intervention, and aesthetic experimentation. Social Practice Queens students have been able to use the museum’s resources to develop and present their work both on-site and within the community. One of our recent exhibitions, “Art As Social Action: 10 Years of Social Practice Queens,” delves into this decade of intimate collaboration, highlighting how it bolstered community efforts and acts of public service.

### Reimagining What a Museum Can Be

It’s been a year since the Queens Museum reopened its doors to the public. Trying to stay afloat amid the waves of post-lockdown unpredictability creates new anxieties. But this unrest has inspired us to reimagine how we co-create with communities both between and beyond our walls.

In January 2020, the museum initiated a new long-term, cross-institutional program, the Year of Uncertainty (YoU). Born out of the states of precarity

## RESOURCES

*Corona Plaza Es Para Todos: Making a Dignified Public Space for Immigrants*

[queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Corona-Plaza-Es-Para-Todos\\_web.pdf](https://queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Corona-Plaza-Es-Para-Todos_web.pdf)

*Art as Social Action: 10 Years of Social Practice Queens*

[queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/AASA-24-Aug-Revised\\_v2.pdf](https://queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/AASA-24-Aug-Revised_v2.pdf)

Samantha Baldwin, “Queens Museum Executive Director Sally Tallant on Her Vision for a More Just Art World,” *Artnet News*, July 27, 2021

[news.artnet.com/career-stories/queens-museum-sally-tallant-more-just-museum-world-1987272](https://news.artnet.com/career-stories/queens-museum-sally-tallant-more-just-museum-world-1987272)

that have been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the crises of inaction and unaccountability related to racial justice and xenophobia, climate reparations, and income disparity, YoU was conceived as a framework for strengthening connection among the Queens Museum, our communities, and constituents through collaborative experimentation.

At the center of YoU are five themes—care, repair, play, justice, and the future—and a cohort of creative interlocutors who have become deeply embedded in the fabric of the museum:

- six artists-in-residence with diverse research-based and socially engaged practices encompassing discursive and participatory forms as well as object-based work;
- nine community partners, which include organizations from across the borough that are tackling issues such as gender justice, mental health, environmental justice, youth enrichment, gun violence prevention and intervention, LGBTQ+ activism, and civil rights for transgender and nonbinary people and sex workers; and
- twelve artists, designers, scientists, writers, architects, and activists invited as “co-thinkers” who serve as mentors and facilitators to artists-in-residence, community partners, and Queens Museum staff.

For example, through YoU, our on-site food relief initiative has evolved into a Cultural Food Pantry where artists-in-residence and community partners weave artistic and cultural activities into the structure of the pantry. And the Year of Uncertainty Summer Community Camp, which offered two weeks of free arts education led by YoU cohort members, was conceived specifically for families visiting the La Jornada Food Pantry.

The Year of Uncertainty has also reshaped our Queens Teens into a more social justice–focused program. Artist-In-Residence Julian Louis Phillips launched “A School of Art & Protest,” a weeklong Queens Teens camp that built community around imagining a future of liberation. For five days, participants explored the histories, strategies, and physicalities of protest and policing grounded in the teachings of the Abolition Movement.

Throughout fall 2021, all ideas, discussions, and materials generated during this camp and other YoU initiatives will be shared through public conversations, activations, and presentations across all the museum’s spaces and platforms. In January 2022, YoU will conclude with collective reflection on this period of experimentation, leading to new, flexible working methods that will help the Queens Museum grow our commitments to culture, accessibility, and equity.

As we reimagine how to inhabit space with a radical, community-driven mission, conversations with people remain at the core of the Queens Museum vision. “It is exciting to see how we can make a museum that is defined by and through dialogue with our neighbors, communities, and constituents,” says Sally Tallant, Queens Museum president and executive director. “Our upcoming capital project, developing a multilingual, intergenerational family learning center, a Queens Children’s Museum, will be pivotal in helping us realize this ambition.”

Porosity and situatedness, at both the local and international levels, continue to guide our work. These pillars have become even more embedded in our mission as we relearn how to move in an ever-changing global context.

**Heryte T. Tequame** is assistant director of communications and digital projects at the Queens Museum in New York City.



Julian Louis Phillips, Year of Uncertainty artist-in-residence, leads a protest poster activity during the Queens Teens Art & Social Justice Camp: A School of Art & Protest in July 2021.



The image shows a museum gallery with a dark brown wall. The wall is covered with numerous framed photographs of African art, including masks, figures, and objects. In the foreground, several large African sculptures are displayed on a white platform. On the left is a tall, slender wooden figure. In the center is a woven, patterned chair. On the right is a large, dark wooden figure with a tall, pointed headdress. The floor is made of light-colored wood in a herringbone pattern.

# Recasting the Civic Imperative of the Museum

Liberating collections from their imperialist pasts can occur through a new model: the museum-university.

By Clémentine Deliss

## As a curator and cultural historian

living in Berlin, I am interested in the possibilities raised by the redesign of museums, particularly those that were established under the cultural politics of colonialism.

All museums are civic spaces that, together with universities and art colleges, perform an important educational role. But how do we make their vast collections of historical artifacts active once more while the world is becoming increasingly virtual? Can we reorganize the exhibition rooms of a museum with mobile workspaces for researchers and students? Can we bring collections into the venue's central space, filling it with artifacts, archives, documents, and miscellanea? The consumerist walk-through would no longer be possible. Instead, the museum would provide everything necessary for hours of study with tables, chairs, technology, mobile vitrines, and, of course, students, who would constitute the key public.

Perhaps we are at a moment when the conflation of exhibitions and new research is possible once again, as it was during the time of German art historians Aby Warburg and Carl Einstein. For Einstein, writing 100 years ago, museums were like "living schools," nurturing rigorous observational analysis and ways of seeing and speaking about human experience. For

Pontus Hultén, the curatorial brain behind the planning of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, a collection was not a shelter for retreat, but a source of energy for the curator and the visitor.

These considerations formed the basis for my direction of the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, Germany, between 2010 and 2015. Founded by citizens in 1904 as an ethnographic museum, it holds over 67,000 artifacts, an image and film archive with 120,000 documents, and a public library with 50,000 books and periodicals.

When I arrived, I wanted to transform this museum, with its contested collections, into a contemporary civic institution. To begin to heal the wounds of the past, I chose to encourage experimentation *inside* the museum by developing dialogues with artists, writers, and historians from the *outside*. The goal was neither armchair anthropology, nor participant observation in the wild, but quite literally fieldwork in the museum.

## What Is the Museum-University?

Over the five years I was there, the Weltkulturen Museum transformed into a civic and educational institution that was unequivocally collection-centric and the precursor to something I call the

Installation view of "Foreign Exchange (or the stories you wouldn't tell a stranger)," curated by Clémentine Deliss and Yvette Mutumba at the Weltkulturen Museum in 2014.





The artist El Hadji Sy preparing for the exhibition “El Hadji Sy. Painting, Performance, Politics,” curated by Clémentine Deliss and Yvette Mutumba, Frankfurt, 2015.



*museum-university*. In 1975 artist Joseph Beuys said, “I want to make museums into universities where there is a practical department of objects. The museum could be the first model of a permanent conference for cultural inquiries.”

Today, there is growing recognition of the value of subjective historiographies drafted by artists based on contested archives and colonial collections. Whether this takes place on the African continent, in the US, or in Europe, the engagement of artists demonstrates the desire to define a new inclusive space that draws on alternative faculties, decolonized methodologies, and shifting cultural and

social contexts. This intersection between museum and university can help in the remediation of colonial collections by activating new approaches to visual education.

Museum-universities can be imagined as forms of horizontal architecture that provide an optimal environment for growth. I sometimes imagine a huge greenhouse structure that enables circulation and juxtapositions between artifacts and archives. With diverse origins and different levels of contention, historical collections are repositioned and navigated into polycultural constellations. Collections are essential in the development of alternative art histories and metafiction through the processes of retrieval, gathering, decoding, and restituting—what American writer and academic Saidiya Hartman calls a work of “critical fabulation.”

So-called ethnographic collections contain live wires of information, or stored code, in art, design, history, architecture, engineering, and much more. But they are also repositories of cultural heritage that are riddled with traces of violence, forced translocation, and illegitimate appropriation. The referentiality of these important collections is yet to be extricated from colonial and ethnographic taxonomies.

Today, while they remain rooted in the Global North, these sequestered artifacts have become vital to reviving visual education and responding to the democratic intellect in the 21st century. Their inaccessibility makes us confront the blockages produced by



Display of weapons designed in the 1980s by a conservator at the Weltkulturen Museum. Installation in the exhibition “Foreign Exchange (or the stories you wouldn’t tell a stranger),” curated by Clémentine Deliss and Yvette Mutumba, 2014.



the ideology of conservation: no oil, sweat, breath, or human friction is possible as long as these artifacts are held under current jurisdiction.

At the Weltkulturen Museum, I dedicated one of the museum's three 19th-century villas to a new space for *post-ethnographic* inquiry. The building consisted of guest apartments on the top floor, a photographic archive in the basement, and lab space in between.

Living and working in the museum, guest researchers could analyze in the lab the artifacts, photographs, and documents they selected in the depot. They could work with the collection as they wished in their own time and with 24-hour unobserved access. Art students from the Städelschule nearby curated their own research exhibitions in the Green Room project space inside the lab.

The lab became a crucible for negotiating new relationships and responsibilities to the institutional history of the museum and its extensive collection. Through the input of external guests—artists, but also lawyers, writers, filmmakers, and anthropologists—I hoped to suspend the classification of objects along the traditional lines of regional divisions and ethnic groupings. Guests included artists John Akomfrah and Sunah Choi, writers Tina Makereti and Tom McCarthy, and filmmaker Werner Herzog, among others.

All exhibitions curated at the Weltkulturen Museum during my time presented the collection together with the outcomes of new exercises in translation. With “Object Atlas: Fieldwork in the Museum,” painting proved to be the red thread between the individual positions of the artists, whose renditions of the ethnographic artifacts allowed visitors to see these objects from different perspectives. Otobong Nkanga photographed herself wearing jewelry from West and Central Africa and subsequently made a series of posters with these images, which were distributed both in Nigeria and through the exhibition. For “Foreign

Fashion designer Buki Akib in the studio of the Weltkulturen Laboratory preparing designs for the exhibition “Trading Style,” curated by Clémentine Deliss and Teimaz Shahverdi, 2021.



## RESOURCES

Metabolic Museum—University  
[kw-berlin.de/en/metabolic-museum-university](http://kw-berlin.de/en/metabolic-museum-university)

Clémentine Deliss,  
*The Metabolic Museum*, 2020

Clémentine Deliss,  
*Object Atlas: Fieldwork in the Museum*, 2012

Clémentine Deliss and Yvette Mutumba,  
*Foreign Exchange (or the stories you wouldn't tell a stranger)*, 2014

Think tank on colonial photography and trade held in 2013 in preparation of the exhibition “Foreign Exchange (or the stories you wouldn’t tell a stranger),” curated by Clémentine Deliss and Yvette Mutumba. Think tank participants include Otobong Nkanga, Michael Clegg, Martin Guttman, Yvette Mutumba, and Clémentine Deliss. Photograph projected onto the wall by Rotimi Fani Kayode.



Exchange (or the stories you wouldn’t tell a stranger),” Peggy Butth reclassified the convolution of missionary photography, and Luke Willis Thompson gifted his materials’ budget toward the repatriation not of an artifact, but of a recently deceased person of African descent from Frankfurt back to Africa. The outcomes of the laboratory experience were unpredictable, in turn affecting the exhibitions, which encouraged visitors to embark on their own fieldwork.

This *post-ethnographic* model sought to generate alternative, decolonial metaphors of interpretation. Finding metaphors for museums is a compelling thought exercise that helps us recognize how much these venues differ in attitude and scale, how they prioritize space and human behavior very differently. Some imagine the successful museum to be an exclusive emporium touting the global experience of art and luxury and complementing new estates and shopping malls. In this place of cultural and intellectual purchase, the public acquires the sheen of high-octane capital. As German philosopher Theodor Adorno once wrote, art, like a casino, cannot lose.

### The Right of Access

In art history, 1989 is commonly recognized as a moment of transformation with the dissolution of the Soviet states, the Tiananmen Square protests, the

demolition of the Berlin Wall, and the reunification of Germany. The year also marks a watershed moment in exhibition-making: the exclusive North American–Western European alliance was irredeemably confronted with alternative flows of modernism and contemporary art from the Global South.

Today, one generation later, the emphatic awareness created by Black Lives Matter in 2020 has brought with it a second paradigmatic shift now shaping how arts institutions contend with representation and equity. My commitment to this process is to push toward legislation for the right of access to colonial collections held in European museums. Whereas it makes sense for someone from a specific region or group to see their artifacts, I believe that access needs to be much more pluralistic, enabling students and researchers to cross over continents and ethnicities and build comparative assemblages. If a museum becomes a university, then access can be democratic—the only remaining hitch is the way the architecture is conceived, and whether the ideological construct around conservation can be loosened to enable analysis.

The legal argument to enable access to these vast “ethnographic” collections for researchers of all nations, cultures, and schools of thought needs to be developed. Only rights of access can generate a *museum of the commons* and, with it, an equitable

reassessment of historical collections while they are stored in Europe.

This differentiated use of the museum highlights its current and uncomfortable condition within the civic environment. New institutions, wrote Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich in 1970, “should be channels to which the learner would have access without credentials or pedigrees—public spaces in which peers and elders outside of his [sic] immediate horizon would become available.” Such an open, untethered location with no vantage points, or attempts to direct the mind toward the confines of one experience or another, would be a field, an expanse, an agronomy where every visitor would farm modest meanings from unmastered works, slowly apprehending the metabolics of the museum as a body.

Since leaving the Weltkulturen Museum in 2015, I have explored different models for a Metabolic Museum–University (MM–U). The MM–U is currently based at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin, where I have brought together a multi-disciplinary faculty that meets regularly and initiates investigations into Berlin’s varied collections. Together we have begun to shape an expanded technique of analysis and interpretation based on diverse private and public collections.

For example, in July 2020 we ran a Debating Chamber in the exhibition of Hassan Sharif at KW. Each participant brought an artifact or element, which was placed on a trestle table. These were moved around as our discussion progressed. Nearly everyone spoke about the evocations produced by the various items and their assemblage. Straight contextual information was avoided. These agent-objects (a term that places artworks and artifacts on the same level and emphasizes agency and dialogue) included musical notation, an Asafo flag from Ghana, small colored glass slides, a photocopy of the pages of open books, a small carved figure, an old plate found in the sea, gilt chains to be worn on the body, a video, half a fresh cow’s liver, part of the skull of a horse, plus Sharif’s surrounding artworks.

As it progresses, the MM-U will expand to include “Companions,” an associated group of young researchers who will work closely with the faculty and delve deeper into the holdings of Berlin’s neighborhood

museums and university collections. The generative process of the MM-U and the outcome of its inquiries will be presented in a publication and comprehensive exhibition to be held at KW in 2023.


## The Post-Colonial Museum

Today, a renewed engagement with archives takes the museum beyond its existing definition toward a more radical understanding of curatorial and educational urgency. Working with collections necessarily addresses what French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls the “stuff of the body” out of which the world is made.

By working through contentious collections, new alliances are formed that question the normativity of inherited colonial disciplines and their genealogies. For example, does it make any sense to retain former divisions between art historical and world-cultures collections today? What do we do about efficiency, ecology, and energy, and how does that reflect in works collected and in the usage of the museum building and infrastructures by human beings and technologies?

The museum of the 21st century is a museum of movement and change, but, above all, it negotiates this new understanding through an intergenerational model. This dialogical constellation is both curative and adventurous. In the world today, there is value to be gained in listening to life histories, making visible former human networks, and building new partnerships.

Museums can fulfill vital functions for a range of friends, guests, students, and visitors whose time in the museum has no limit. The public is welcomed into a foyer of experience, sitting, reading, watching, and conversing with one another—in short, all the activities that were central to museums prior to the 19th-century colonial model.

 **Clémentine Deliss** is global humanities visiting professor in art at the University of Cambridge (2021–22) and associate curator at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin, where she is developing the Metabolic Museum–University.





By Ashley Rogers

# Pushing the Boundaries

The Whitney Plantation Museum confronts the truth of its history in all facets of its operations.

**In the weeks before** Whitney Plantation opened to the public in 2014, the grounds quiet and still while we mapped out where furniture would be placed in the 18th-century Big House, I had a persistent, nagging thought: What if nobody comes?

I was well familiar with plantation museums. Growing up in North Carolina, the daughter of a public historian, plantations were a regular part of

my extracurricular education. Nothing in North Carolina, however, compares to the massive industry around plantation tourism that exists on Louisiana's River Road. While many sites remained steadfastly dedicated to lifting up the stories of plantation owners, Whitney Plantation was established as a site of memory to honor the lives of enslaved people.

If visitors coming to Whitney expect a "normal"

All photos courtesy of the Whitney Plantation





The Field of Angels memorial is dedicated to the more than 2,000 enslaved children who died in St. John the Baptist Parish between the 1820s and 1840s. The statue, *Coming Home*, is by sculptor Rod Moorhead.





plantation tour, I thought, what happens when they get a tour about slavery? What if there is no audience for this history? Worse, what if people get angry and combative?

My fears about an empty house started to change when we opened our gates on December 7, 2014, to a crowd of 750 people. A slow start in the early weeks of 2015 ended when the *New York Times Magazine* published an eight-page profile of Whitney Plantation's founder, John Cummings, three months after we opened. Overnight, our visitation tripled.

The next few years of running the museum were a frantic blur of trying to keep up with demand. Since then, our problem has never been a lack of interest. But curiously, I see my latent fear pop up over and over again in visitors, journalists, public historians, and academics. They ask me in almost the exact same language, every time: "Do you ever get pushback?"

When people ask me this, I sometimes sense that they are craving stories of clueless visitors angrily fretting that what Whitney says is not *real* history. I think, even if they don't realize it, many people ask because they want to feel superior. Safe and secure in knowing

that they understand the truth about our nation's history, they can scoff and gawk at people who have been swindled by Lost Cause narratives and *Gone with the Wind*.

In 2019, a *Washington Post* essay that cherry-picked the most alarmist Tripadvisor reviews of a few plantation sites went viral, and it fed on the online outrage machine. Look at these people who don't understand that plantations had slavery! Other journalists, as well as colleagues and friends, called me up with an almost gleeful need to gossip about these deranged visitors that they thought were crowding my site. I disappointed them every time when I told them that the vast majority of people who come to Whitney are not shocked that slavery existed. They want to hear these stories. They want to learn. The overwhelming response I hear is gratitude.

I understand that historical interpretation is an inherently political process, and preserving the stories of marginalized people can be dangerous and fraught. Museums and monuments that preserve Black history have often been targets for vandalism. In the Deep South, terrorism against Black people



Gwendolyn Midlo Hall Allées memorial is dedicated to the more than 100,000 Africans enslaved in Louisiana before 1820.

The Big House, built ca. 1790, with a statue by Woodrow Nash in the foreground.



and Black institutions remains a fact of life. People's expectations that Whitney Plantation would be a target of hatred are by no means unfounded.

At the same time, there is a tremendous hunger in this country to hear the truth, particularly among younger visitors. Many young people are not persuaded by the same narratives that plantation museums perpetuated for decades.

If I sometimes hear a desire for gossip in peoples' interest in our visitors, I also sense, among colleagues, a certain trepidation about delving into history the way we do. They worry what visitors will think, how donors or the board will react, or how they will get staff buy-in.

If what I've seen over the past seven years at Whitney is any indication, we needn't be worried about going too far. We should be worried about not going far enough.

### Connecting Present to Past

Whitney Plantation opened a few months after Michael Brown was murdered in Ferguson, Missouri. Our visitors, very obviously, had Black Lives Matter protests at the top of their minds in those early months—as they would dozens of other times, whenever there were major Black Lives Matter protests or as the political climate changed.



On our reflection wall in the visitor center, we have collected thousands of notes about everything from the deeply personal, such as family stories, to the political. Visitors write that Black Lives Matter. They talk about the prison system. Now, our visitors are enraged about the laws that ban teaching critical race theory.

It is worth noting that none of these topics are covered on the tour and that visitors most often write *after* their tour is complete. It is very clear to us that whether or not we engage with the history that is unfolding around us, our visitors are taking what they learn on the tour and making connections to the present.

Whitney Plantation is far from the only site that has the answers to why the United States still struggles with racism, white supremacy, and inequality. We at Whitney, and our colleagues around the country, must answer those questions directly.



## Living Our Mission

Our organizational practices are just as important, in many ways, as our interpretive practices. We think hard about what our dedication to our mission means for our behind-the-scenes work. Our audience, too, is very concerned with our ethics. One of the most common questions we get is, “Where does the money go?”

Money is a difficult issue on a site of stolen labor. What is morally or ethically right, given our unique history, takes on extra importance. Whitney Plantation is a 501(c)(3) with a majority-Black staff and board, and descendants of people once enslaved at the plantation work at all levels of our staff. Because enslaved people and their descendants were never paid for their work on this site, we do not use volunteer labor or unpaid interns.

We are conscious, too, of what we sell in the gift shop. We do not sell anything that is made outside of the United States unless it is certified fair trade. We prefer union-made products and products from Black-owned businesses and companies that support environmental and charitable causes. Most recently, we removed all non-fair-trade chocolate from the shop because of its connection to slave labor in Africa.

Many visitors don't know about these practices, and especially given our well-known white founder, they are worried that the money they pay at the gate to hear about slavery on a plantation only makes a white man wealthier. We are not merely reacting to visitor concerns in our operational practices that address these issues; this is who we are, and it is baked into our mission, vision, and strategic plan. We are aware that we will always be under justifiable scrutiny, and it is our responsibility to live up to our mission as best we can in ways that people will not always see.

## Addressing the Harm

Whitney Plantation certainly has its own unique set of challenges and opportunities, but there are lessons to be learned for all museums. Most museums must wrestle with what I see as two levels of harm: the historical harm and the institutional harm.

The historical harm is the trauma that occurred on the site, or the harm that the museum interprets. Most museums interpret some form of historical trauma. Whether it is a plantation museum interpreting


slavery, an art museum that displays looted artifacts, or a major history center with exhibits about colonialism and wars against Indigenous people, most museums have a story to tell about human suffering.

Institutional harm, by contrast, is the harm inflicted by the museum itself. Many museums have not adequately dealt with their own institutional histories. This type of harm might include a museum that was segregated, a museum that has not appropriately repatriated ancestors in compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, or a museum that has engaged in discriminatory employment practices.

At Whitney Plantation, our historical harm encompasses the more than 200-year period that the plantation operated—from 1752 until 1975—during which Africans and their descendants were enslaved and worked in debt peonage. We are a young museum, and so we have a lighter institutional footprint. To minimize our institutional harm, we must constantly remain nimble and self-aware; we have to reevaluate our practices and shine a harsh internal light to root out issues of bias and inequity.

Most importantly, we—and I speak here both of Whitney Plantation and the field more broadly—should not operate under the assumption that we will always get it right. Doing good work is a process, not a destination. Just because Whitney Plantation takes a more inclusive approach does not give us a free pass. We have not always, and we will not always, “get it right.”

Doing the internal work around identity and bias, especially on a site of such enormous historical trauma, will always be hard and sometimes painful. But it can also be joyous. We have an incredible opportunity not just for our own personal growth as a staff and board, but to provide a space of healing for the people who come to us. One visitor's note that will always stay with me, and that guides me when things get very hard, said simply: “Now I can cry without shame.”

 **Ashley Rogers** is executive director of The Whitney Institute & Whitney Plantation Museum in Wallace, Louisiana.





# A GLOBAL VIEW

AAM-Getty International Program alumni  
reflect on the redefinition of museum.

Deepest gratitude to the Getty Foundation, which has supported for over a decade the AAM-Getty International Program at the AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo to forge connections between museum professionals in the US and globally in a shared understanding of museum missions, practices, ideals, and aspirations.



Egypt



By Wesam Mohamed

# The Path to Colonial Reckoning

Tahrir Square  
in front of Cairo  
Egyptian Museum.



**O**n July 26, 2021, the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities announced the repatriation of a Nikaw-Ptah statue from the Netherlands. The statue was first unearthed in Egypt by local looters as part of illicit digging organized by people looking to get rich on the high demand for Egyptian antiquities.

Illicit digging is a real problem for archaeologists because they cannot identify who was digging, where they were digging, when the object was discovered, or how it was moved out of Egypt. Therefore, most of the object's background is lost forever. The story of the repatriation process most likely replaces the original history of the object since it has lost its original context.

This story is all too common in many parts of the post-colonial world. In Egypt, tales of illegal digging, artifact trafficking, looting and looters, and repatriation of antiquities are frequent, especially in crisis situations such as war or political upheaval. The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Tourism and Antiquities Police need the international community to stop these assaults on Egypt's tangible past.

For centuries, most of the Western world ignored Egyptian heritage altogether. That changed in 1798, following Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. From that time forward, many Western museums and private collectors established their collections from looted Egyptian antiquities. No one record exists of all Egyptian antiquities in museum collections, much less those privately owned. These colonial practices disconnected Egyptians from their own heritage. Removing these items forever altered their historical and cultural context.

Here is one example of this in my work in Egypt. In April 2021, 22 mummies of the most important kings and queens of ancient Egypt were moved from Cairo's classic Egyptian Museum to the newly constructed National Museum of Egyptian Civilization. The mummies' journey to their new museum home

helped reverse more than 150 years of systematic looting of Egyptian heritage in ancient Thebes (now Luxor).


Egypt's Ministry of Antiquities organized "The Pharaohs' Golden Parade" in the streets of Cairo to celebrate the mummies' move to their new home. The parade evoked an unprecedented wave of local pride and connection to Egyptian heritage. It brought ancient history into the streets where Egyptians walk and wander daily and inspired large numbers of Egyptians to visit the National Museum to see the new display for the royal mummies.

What can we all learn from this example? First, we should be tireless in our efforts to reverse the impacts of cultural colonialism. Organizational and individual acts are necessary to help Egyptians reconnect with their history and to end the cultural colonization of Egyptian heritage.

Second, decolonization is one of many tools museums have to enhance cultural life and connect people to their own heritage. One of the first steps is accessibility to collections. Egyptians inside Egypt have the right to connect with Egyptian collections in London, learn from Egyptian collections in Turin, and enjoy Egyptian collections in Paris. We must make this a priority.

Finally, organizations with colonial pasts have an ethical responsibility to the communities to whom those collections belong. These obligations include promoting cultural awareness, building relationships with heritage, enhancing identities, and provoking ownership.

At its heart, decolonization is as much about doing the right thing as it is about allowing for cultures to regain a sense of ownership of their past. It must become a priority for museum professionals worldwide.

 **Wesam Mohamed** is curator at the Ministry of Antiquities in Egypt.



The Homeland Museum of Knjaževac organized a workshop for children to learn about the principles of Braille letters used for blind and partially sighted people.



# Museums for All

By Milena Milošević Micić

**T**hough museums should never be neutral, they must be as objective as possible as they serve their roles as truth- and science-based emitters of knowledge and forums for public debate. Museums should be communication channels and places of change and dialogue, initiators of the peace-building processes among, for, and with their communities.


Museums also play a significant role in teaching the importance of cultural heritage to the past, and to the present. They not only help us understand who we are as individuals and what is, or should be, our role as humans in the world, they are also initiators of, and mediums for, cultural communication.

I have seen all of these principles (and more) in action as part of the Balkan Museum Network (BMN) ([bmuseums.net/about-us](http://bmuseums.net/about-us)). The group exists to celebrate, preserve, and share the complex common heritage of the Balkans and to create a strong, collective voice for Balkan heritage and the museum profession. BMN promotes museums as institutions of learning, discovery, and inspiration. We believe museums are active agents of social change—owned and guarded by society, open to everybody, and for the benefit of all. We approach this work with a spirit of cooperation and commitment to overcome provincial politics as we encourage museums throughout the Balkans to be resources for education, communication, peace building, and conflict resolution. In September 2021 BMN hosted the Meet, See, Do international conference where we reassessed our roles and relevancy in a post-COVID world in the areas of common heritage in danger, risk management, collection management, audience development, and access and inclusion.

As a member of the network's Balkan Museum Access Group (BMAG), a group of museum

professionals from the region who have been trained by UK experts in the areas of access and inclusion, I have focused on another imperative: accessibility. This peer-learning group of nine individuals from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia, and Serbia are putting accessibility into their daily museum practices. We have managed to identify, overcome, or even remove some of the barriers that exist in our institutions and societies, exchange knowledge and experience, re-establish connections, and change attitudes. These bridges will open new perspectives and possibilities in the region that will improve not only the quality of work in our museums, but also the quality of life of people in our communities. They will help us grow and develop both professionally and personally in our shared journey toward fulfilment of our mission as dedicated museum professionals and activists.

Throughout my museum and cultural heritage career, I have seen the significant role museums play in the sustainable development of the local community. My everyday museum practice; active participation in professional associations and international exchanges; and engagements with BMN, BMAG, and the AAM-Getty International Program have all helped me better understand how museums open new spheres of possibilities. Museums can help people express their right to freely participate in the cultural life of their community, allowing them to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

 **Milena Milošević Micić** is museum advisor and art historian at the Homeland Museum of Knjaževac in Serbia.



Community outreach program for blind or partially sighted visitors at the 2015 exhibition "A Place to Live When We Become Old" by artist Ana Gallardo at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (MAMBA).



# Humanizing the Museum Field

By Germán Paley

“Accessibility is much more than guaranteeing the access to what already exists but actually it consists in bringing into existence the world you DESIRE.”

—**Daina Leyton**,  
Brazilian inclusive activist



**M**useum practice is both social and collective, moved by affection for and professional inspiration from colleagues around the globe. Museum professionals worldwide share a common belief that the social dimension of our institutions helps us expand our horizons.

We are truly nodes in a network that gives us significance, and we can strengthen our field if we focus on people. Collections serve as a departure point for meaningful connections, providing a web of resilience based on respect, empathy, and a common ground of shared knowledge to surmount the collective traumas of homophobia, classism, racism, ageism, and credentialism, among others.

I like to think of a museum as energy. What is the energy of your museum right now? What do you perpetuate? What do you change? How can you transform your space, objects, and experiences into more meaningful experiences for others?

### Between the Inherited Past and Uncertain Future

2020 was a watershed, a year when museum practice changed forever. The COVID-19 pandemic forced museum professionals globally to reflect more deeply on our responsibilities to not only our visitors but our communities.

Moving forward, we must continue to reimagine new bonds and connections to take our institutions to a place where they are meaningful for the people that animate them (visitors, staff, communities, etc.). We must be innovative in the ways we fulfill our mission; we must reimagine museums with a humane core, activating new narratives (and poetics) based on a museology of affection. This ideal deconstructs the very notion of *museum* and urges reconsideration of all of our inherited ideas about museum practices. In doing so, we open up new experiences where the “visitor” becomes the real focus of the museum, perhaps, becoming a “local.” ;)

### The Museum as an Exercise of Community

Here is one example from the “before times.” In 2016, I began to develop the Community Outreach Program at the Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires. Our goal was to transform the museum into a participatory

experience in which we encouraged visitors to relate our collections to their own life and experiences.

Our core purpose was *El Museo Humano* (“Humanizing the Museum”). We used art as a medium to address issues such as inequality, solitude, and exclusion along three interconnected lines of thought and practice: senior citizens, mental health and accessibility, and citizenship participation.

As educators we listened to people and built bonds of learning together with them. Seniors taught the museum about resilience and hope, children on the autism spectrum taught us different ways to discover a painting, and people who are blind allowed us to see through perception.

### New Questions Are Required

As the world continues to grapple with this global pandemic, I’m struck by how these experiences are a powerful reminder of the many ways museums serve our communities, creating a space for dialogue and belonging. Museums must seize this moment to continue to be more people-centric. Colleagues such as Tatiana Quevedo at Bogota, Colombia’s Contemporary Art Museum or Encarna Lago at Lugo’s Museum Network in Galicia, Spain, have inspired me to address the museum field’s most urgent task: providing alternative avenues of connection when public health protocols require distance and isolation.

As museum practitioners, it is our responsibility to open our institutions (and, more importantly, ourselves) to a genuine dialogue with others to transform what we do, how we do it, and with whom. Museums are alive and made by people. Who gives life to your museum? How is life respected at your museum? Use these questions as the compass in charting new routes.

As we emerge from the pandemic, my hope is that the lessons we learned will firmly debunk the perpetual inside-outside binary our field seems to cling to.

**Germán Paley** is a social museologist and art educator who collaborates as an external adviser on accessibility at the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico.



By Ignacio Paravano

Guatemala



# The Twilight Zone

A teacher and student discuss the legacy of violence and resistance in Guatemala while viewing the virtual exhibition "House of Memory."



**W**hen you are an exhibit designer, migrating from a physical space (walls, displays, and showcases) to a virtual reality feels like stepping into the Twilight Zone. The fear of this unknown often makes us too conservative in practice. The results are often tepid, mere reproductions of the traditional museum model presented in the virtual space.

We must resist the urge to follow this path as it misses the opportunity we have to dream up a new kind of virtual museum experience, one that leads to a more all-encompassing, inclusive exhibit design.

When that unknown realm no longer scares us, when we overcome doubts, when we dare to rupture the classic idea of a museum, we can then begin to imagine and create a different, bolder, more daring virtual museography. Ultimately, it is a museum with no space limitations.

Physical museums have boundaries. Exhibition halls have walls that limit us; the museum's location impacts visitation. These dimensions narrow the possibilities for exhibitions. As those boundaries expand, as we blur lines, crack limits, and capture the power of virtuality, museums become more reachable, more democratic.

My work as an exhibit designer is mainly geared toward memory museums and activism. Through immersive and interactive practice, institutions connect with visitors through resources that mobilize and raise awareness, create open dialogue, and offer spaces for reflection. I have found the internet to be among the best tools for this work.

Embracing virtuality has not only helped me open new spaces and a direct interaction with visitors, but it has also become a platform to reach an audience that would not otherwise visit the museum. In creating the Virtual Memory Museum of Guatemala, I sought to break down those walls through established structures and a new space for activism. Our goal was a museum for all: available everywhere and anywhere.

The original Guatemala Memory Museum served first as a place to gather and debate. It was an educational space of a more inclusive history of Guatemala, including the country's past history of violence and genocide—the many stories missing from official government accounts.


The museum's work is vital in a nation where oblivion is state policy. Having to close this space due to the pandemic was a hard blow for the memory, truth, and justice this Central American country has sought for so long. Virtuality was the option to stay "open" and keep memories alive.

So 2020 was the year of our virtual museum. It became a useful resource for educational institutions, for those young people who want to know the unofficial history of Guatemala in a high-impact, far-reaching, inclusive space. What was devised as a counterpart to the physical exhibition became a great outreach tool, a new place to gather and reflect.

The objective of a virtual museum is to be inclusive. It is how we can take our exhibits to homes, schools, and communities in the most remote regions of Guatemala. Just a few months after its launch, the virtual exhibition has had several thousand visits, thus multiplying the usual flow of visitors into the museum.

Virtuality is the key to creating new narrative forms, even some not thought of until now. I don't believe virtual museums will ever replace the physical museum, but we cannot ignore this new tool. We have the choice, as museum creators, to use these new technologies and ponder the new possibilities they afford, thus democratizing museums and making them more inclusive.

Isn't that the goal after all?

 **Ignacio Paravano** is an exhibit designer at Casa de la Memoria de Guatemala.





# Wherever and Whoever You Are

"que nada nos limite. Que nada nos defina. Que nada nos sujete. Que la libertad sea nuestra propia sustancia!"

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR



Periódico mural at  
Brillantinas MUAC  
Instagram account.

By Rebeca Richter

**M**useo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC), the National University's Contemporary Art Museum in Mexico City, is not only a museum. It also perceives itself as a vehicle for social and cultural change; a laboratory of aesthetic, playful, and meaningful experiences that develop critical thinking; and a

museum with a democratic and open character that challenges plurality and offers multiple visions of reality.

The COVID-19 global pandemic forced us to embrace a digital perspective in response to the isolation of quarantining. Connecting and participating with others has become more urgent, and thus we have

been focused on advancing programs that are more necessary and timely than ever.

Similar to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) initiatives in the US, MUAC has its DIA Project, which proposes a series of curatorial, artistic, pedagogical, academic, and communicative strategies that measurably improve our institution's diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. We also put special emphasis on building communities from an empathic and affective perspective of shared knowledge and co-creation. Here are some of the highlights of our new programs.

We solicited viewpoints and ideas on inclusive and diverse museums, through an open call to museum professionals and museum-goers, to produce a collective manifesto: "Museums for all" to include many voices, images, and sign language. It was intended for the general public and students of the Center of Attention for Students with Disabilities of the Ministry of Education nationwide ([muac.unam.mx/evento/manifiesta-tu-museo](http://muac.unam.mx/evento/manifiesta-tu-museo)).

We launched Brillantinas (@brillantinas\_muac), a digital mediation space on Instagram that shares artistic practices and methodologies through the lens of gender. Brillantinas also includes free downloads of publications, conversations, music, stickers, and videos, spreading the message beyond the digital realm.

Another initiative is called "Ni bonitas ni calladitas" (neither quiet nor pretty), a Mexican saying that empowers women to be more than a suppressed object of desire. This program for self-care highlights gender issues through workshops, talks, a bazaar, stand-up presentations, and more. It is a venue for the women of a low-income community to share empathic tools to become more supportive of each other and thus stronger in the face of everyday challenges.

MUAC is also digitizing our artistic and documentary collection and, at the same time, organizing an international academic meeting, Heritage in a Bit, to bring together digital preservationists, heritage curators, activists, artists, and cultural critics to reflect upon the contemporary conditions of digital preservation from cultural and museological practices.

And finally, there's #MUACdondeEstés (#MUACWhereverYouAre), a digital response to the pandemic that includes diverse and engaging content. Our #TBT (throwback Thursday) posts have


included audiovisual presentations of past exhibits; video tutorials on how to make several artsy gadgets at home; editorial recommendations from our past exhibition publications (with free PDF downloads at [muac.unam.mx/publicaciones](http://muac.unam.mx/publicaciones)); Sala 10, a virtual space showcasing multimedia contemporary art, mostly new releases—some specifically created for this space; and podcasts like Gran Hotel Abismo that discusses art, critical theory, and visual culture from an enigmatic, philosophical, spectral, and very much metaphorical hotel on the edge of a cliff ([muac.unam.mx/podcasts/gran-hotel-abismo](http://muac.unam.mx/podcasts/gran-hotel-abismo)).

Throughout it all, and throughout this past year, we have found that our greatest strength lies when WE (staff, interns, visitors, our communities) work together with artwork, collections, and accessible physical spaces as well as with knowledge, emotional understanding, and digital equipment. Broadened perspectives are an asset to our team and our continuous advancement toward an active, innovative, and inclusive museum.

It has been difficult, to say the least, to keep up with the digital avalanche, with a closed physical museum space, within a lonely house/office, under Zoom-mania and insomnia, with all the frustrations, fears, and losses that come with this pandemic.

But I've realized that this work is not about me; it's not personal. So many things that have bothered me or given me this sensation of being lost, less professional, less empowered, less effective are just because I can't feel the others. In the end, people who work at museums do it for someone else. The result is seeing people at the exhibitions or workshops or seminars enjoying themselves, learning, participating.

Now I can't actually experience this, but I know they, you, are there reading and watching and listening. And hopefully feeling less lonely and more motivated. So yes, museum work and diversity, inclusion, and accessibility programs are about and for you, and me, but substantially, they are for us.

 **Rebeca Richter** works in Strategic Alliances at the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico.





# Museums and Radical Change

By Dr. Winani Thebele



Scobie Lekhutile and Tshepo Skwambane during co-narration of the Botswana objects at the Brighton Museum Warehouse.



**M**useums around the world are locked in conversations about decolonization, change, equity, diversity, innovation. For most museums this means acknowledging our colonialist histories and doing what we can to mitigate the damage. Nowhere is this truer than at the Botswana National Museum.

Many museums in the Global North and South were founded with colonial tendencies. This explains the existence of outdated public spaces that are racist, elitist, and full of demeaning narratives and stereotyped displays of colonized people and cultures. This also explains the global outcry for museums to decolonize, review their collections, conduct provenance research, and, above all, reconstitute cultural property back to countries of origin.

Decolonization entails breaking away from all colonial shackles and assuming a new and different posture that stands for all equally. Museums that ignore the harmful effects of colonization will remain irrelevant and isolated. Museums of the international community often stay relevant by addressing a wide range of contemporary issues (in Botswana it is HIV, xenophobia, passion killings, women empowerment, unemployment, refugees, and restitution). We've learned already that our museums should open doors to all members and classes in society and also act as a platform for the practice and expression of our visitors' talents and views.

Central to all of these innovations is the need to reassess our collections, do provenance research, and repatriate items to their countries of origin when applicable.

The Botswana National Museum, in partnership with the University of Sussex (project host), the Brighton Museum, and the Khama III Memorial Museum in Botswana, is involved in one such project with the colonial-era collections of the UK's Brighton Museum. The project, "Making African Connections: Decolonial Futures for Colonial Collections," is a


two-year research project inspired by calls for the return of African colonial-era collections in UK museums and by actions toward the decolonization of museums.

The partnership is a collaboration between regional museums in Sussex and Kent with African institutions, museum professionals, and historians and African diaspora interest groups. Though our ultimate goal is the repatriation of Botswana's material culture, our work seeks first to include Africans in the interpretation and future of African collections in UK museums. This includes making the UK museums' collections digitally accessible to African publics and the diaspora and centering African voices and views in interpretation.

The project demonstrates that decolonization is possible through co-curation of collections, provenance research, and collaboration with colonialist museums. It supports my own research area and thesis, *The Migrated Museum: Restitution or a Shared Heritage?*, that decolonization and shared heritage are not mutually exclusive; the two concepts are actually inseparable.

"Making African Connections" demonstrates how the role and responsibility of the global museum has evolved from being the custodian of objects to being a civic space and a public asset. It has become a prism of identity and steward of cultural heritage and collections. Our work together shows effective decolonization efforts across international borders. That the involved museums are meeting their expected roles in less traditional ways should inspire museums lagging behind in the call for decolonization, restitution, and community orientation.

Respecting cultural heritage is the very least we should expect from our international colleagues.

  
**Dr. Winani Thebele** is chief curator and head of the Ethnology Division at the Botswana National Museum.





# Accreditation and MAP Celebrate Anniversaries

## It's time to celebrate!

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Accreditation Program and the 40th anniversary of the Museum Assessment Program (MAP). Cumulatively, these programs have engaged more than 8,000 museums and over 100,000 museum professionals and have had an immeasurable positive impact and influence on the evolution of the US museum field.

The Alliance board, staff, and Accreditation Commission

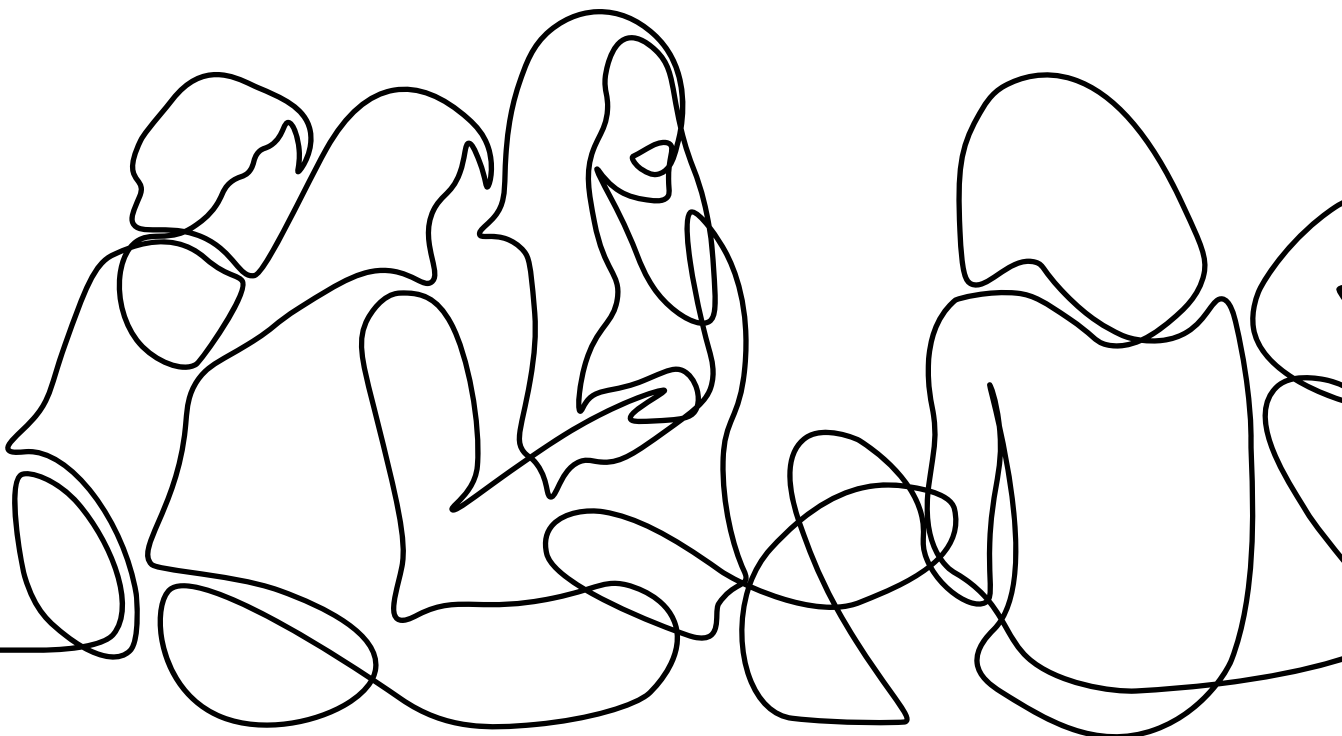
raise a virtual glass in gratitude to all the museum professionals, volunteers, and members of the governing bodies who have participated in the two programs over the past five decades.

These programs have been the catalyst for exponential growth and change. Consider that for every museum review, there are one or two peer reviewers and at least 10 people involved in activities ranging from gathering data, completing questionnaires, or meeting with one or more site

reviewers. Through meaningful dialogue on standards and ethics, participants have gained knowledge and wisdom they have shared with others to champion high-performing museums.

We look forward to celebrating this milestone in person at the 2022 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo. And be on the lookout for the January/February 2022 issue of *Museum*, which will highlight some of the museum innovations and accomplishments that these programs have inspired.

iStock.com/Tetiana Garkusha



# Congratulations

TO THE FIRST ROUND OF AWARDEES!

Alfred Box of Books Library • Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum • Bell Museum • C Williams Rush Museum of African-American Arts & Culture • Calaboose African American History Museum • Campo Band of Mission Indians • Carnegie Science Center • Central Arkansas Library System • Children's Museum of the East End • Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens • Dallas Public Library • Discovery Center of Springfield • Exploration Place • Galesburg Public Library • Glendale Library, Arts & Culture • Grand Rapids Children's Museum Hull Lifesaving Museum, Inc. • Ihan-tonwan Community College • Imagine Children's Museum • Irish American Heritage Museum • Japanese Friendship Garden Society of San Diego Joseph Moore Museum • Kentucky Museum • Lehigh University Art Galleries • Long Island Children's Museum • Lynn Meadows Discovery Center • Makah Cultural and Research Center • Maryland Science Center Public Library • Rochester Public Library District • Science Museum of Virginia • Spokane County Library District • Springfield Cultural Partnership • The Children's Museum of Indianapolis • The Franklin Institute • The Health Museum • The Peale Virginia Air & Space Science Center • Virginia Nottoway Indian Circle and Square Foundation • Witte Museum

— FIFTY-ONE —  
museums, libraries, and  
tribal organizations awarded  
funding in the first round of  
*Communities for Immunity*

Meicey Memorial Library • Mexican Cultural Center DuPage • Mid-Continent Public Library • Muhammad Ali Center • National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel Neville Public Museum Foundation North Dakota's Gateway to Science Nottoway County Public Library System • Orlando Science Center Pensacola MESS Hall • Pike County Public Library • Pulaski County



## Communities for Immunity

Museums and Libraries as  
Trusted Community Partners

[communitiesforimmunity.org](http://communitiesforimmunity.org)

➔ To learn about a few of the innovative ways that recipients are using these funds, find the full press release at: [aam-us.org/press](http://aam-us.org/press)

*Communities for Immunity* is an initiative of the Association of Science and Technology Centers, Institute of Museum and Library Services, American Alliance of Museums, and the Network of the National Library of Medicine, with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



## Use Your Voice to Make the Case for Museums

Museums Advocacy Day is a unique opportunity to unite with museum colleagues and supporters from across the country as one voice by connecting with lawmakers to reaffirm our value, collective contributions, and aspirations. Powerful programming and resources provide all advocates with the information and insights needed to effectively speak up for museums.

**We must make the case for museums.** As museums continue to face and recover from the pandemic, it is imperative that we join forces with fellow museum supporters and professionals to make our voices heard with legislators and their staff early and often in 2022, including during Museums Advocacy Day. We must continue to speak up and share our stories if we are to encourage continued and future congressional support for museums.

**Constituents are the best advocates.** As a constituent, you are in the best position to have

a lasting impact on your legislators and their staff members. Constituent visits have a greater influence on legislators than any other group or strategy. It's up to each of us to tell the story of how museums are essential in our communities. Your constituency is your advocacy superpower.

There are many ways to join the Museums Advocacy Day action and be a part of our collective movement. Visit [aam-us.org/programs/museums-advocacy-day](http://aam-us.org/programs/museums-advocacy-day) for more information and ways to participate today!

## More than \$1.1 Billion in Relief Funding for Museums

As of October 18, more than \$1.1 billion in US Small Business Administration (SBA) Shuttered Venue Operators Grants (SVOG) has been awarded to 793 museums across the country, with 113 of those hardest hit by the pandemic awarded an additional \$50 million in supplemental grants.

The Alliance worked tirelessly and around the clock to successfully include museums in the relief legislation that created the SVOG program. And we continue to work with SBA officials on the ongoing implementation of the program. While progress at times was slower than anticipated, we were delighted by this critical and historic federal support for museums.

We would welcome hearing from you at [governmentrelations@aam-us.org](mailto:governmentrelations@aam-us.org) about how the relief funding helped your museum, staff, and community.

In addition, we encourage you to take a moment to thank your US representative and senators (find them at [congressweb.com/AAM/legislators#/legislators](http://congressweb.com/AAM/legislators#/legislators)) for these relief funds, and let them know how this critical support will help your museum serve its community. We have provided a template letter for your convenience at [congressweb.com/AAM/79#/79/](http://congressweb.com/AAM/79#/79/). Your voice is essential to our continuing advocacy efforts.

## Communities for Immunity Initiative Promotes COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence

In August 2021, the Association of Science and Technology Centers and the American Alliance of Museums launched Communities for Immunity, an initiative supporting the work of museums and libraries in engaging their communities to boost COVID-19 vaccine confidence. As trusted community partners, museums and libraries play a critical role in building vaccine confidence and fighting the pandemic. Supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Institute of Museum & Library Services (IMLS), this program provides funding to leverage deep relationships with local communities to enhance vaccine uptake. On September 22, the first round of funding was awarded to 51 museums and libraries (see page 51). Second-round funding will be announced in November.



# It's time for museums to change the narrative about what it means to grow old in America.



## Museums and Creative Aging: A Healthful Partnership



At the Louisiana State Museum, teaching artist Baba Luther Gray led a course on the influences and rhythms of New Orleans music. Courtesy: Louisiana State Museum

This landmark report, “Museums and Creative Aging: A Healthful Partnership,” commissioned by AAM and written by Marjorie Schwarzer, is a call to action for museums to take a fresh approach to the experiences they offer people fifty-five and better.

Opening with an overview of aging and ageism in the United States, the report documents actions being taken to foster positive aging, profiles the work of museums providing creative aging programming, and shares lessons learned from the Seeding Vitality Arts in Museums initiative of Aroha Philanthropies.

## Learn more in this new capstone report, now available for free download.

[aam-us.org/museums-creative-aging](http://aam-us.org/museums-creative-aging)





## New Jobs



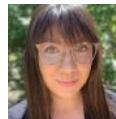
**Aaron Berger**, *Executive Director*, The Neon Museum, Las Vegas, NV



**Melissa Higgins**, *Vice President of Programs and Exhibits*, Boston Children's Museum, MA



**Jarrad Bittner**, *Director*, i.d.e.a. Museum, Mesa, AZ



**Yinshi Lerman-Tan**, *Associate Curator of American Art*, The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA



**Jacqueline Eyl**, *Chief Program Officer*, KID Museum, Bethesda, MD



**Miranda Saylor**, *Center for Spain in America (CSA) Curatorial Fellow*, Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, TX



**Clarisse Fava-Piz**, *Mellon Curatorial Fellow*, Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, TX



**Virginia Shearer**, *Executive Director*, Sarasota Art Museum, FL

## In Memoriam



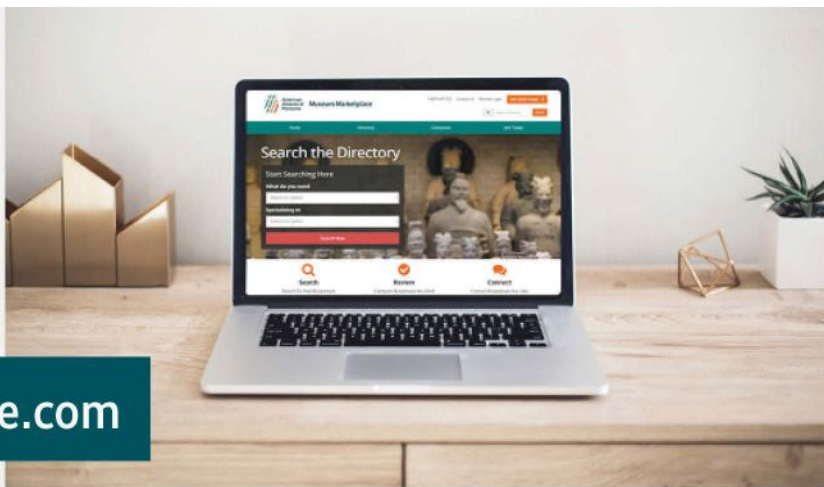
**Stuart Silver**, pioneering design director for the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1962 to 1978, died on May 6, 2021, at the age of 84. His self-described philosophy that “a museum was a place of pleasure, that a spectacle could also be enrichment” revolutionized exhibition design and ushered in the age of the blockbuster. Using techniques borrowed from film production and stage design, Silver created groundbreaking exhibitions, including “Treasures of Tutankhamun” (1978) and “The Vatican Collections: The Papacy and Art” (1983; also at the Art Institute of Chicago). Over the course of his long career, he designed major installations for museums, libraries, and governments around the world and served as a trustee for museums and charitable organizations. Silver’s innovative vision elevated museums in the public eye and brought brilliance and complexity to the presentation of fine art—a change that resonated throughout the field when it was new and continues to influence exhibition design to this day.

WHAT'S YOUR  
CAREER NEWS?

Tell us your news at  
[bit.ly/CareerNewsAAM](https://bit.ly/CareerNewsAAM).

Choose from  
over 100  
providers on

» [MuseumMarketplace.com](https://www.museummarketplace.com)



Head to a **one-stop-shop** to search companies that offer products and services to help museums operate smoothly. Search by location, or by dozens of categories—from design to displays, from sanitization to construction.



American  
Alliance of  
Museums

2451 Crystal Drive, Suite 1005  
Arlington, VA 22202 | [aam-us.org](https://www.aam-us.org)

## Advertiser Guide

10-31 <b>Inside Front Cover</b>	Flutter & Wow page <b>55</b>
AAM MAP Anniversary page <b>1</b>	GLASBAU HAHN America page <b>7</b>
AAM Annual Meeting page <b>19</b>	Lighting Services page <b>3</b>
AAM Communities for Immunity page <b>51</b>	Museum and Library Furniture page <b>15</b>
AAM Creative Aging page <b>53</b>	Rowman and Littlefield <b>Inside Back Cover</b>
AAM Membership Resource page <b>55</b>	Wallace Foundation <b>Back Cover</b>



FLUTTER & WOW MUSEUM PRODUCTS

THE INDISPENSABLE & VERSATILE  
**MUSEUM BRACKET™**

Perfect for reader rails & displays!

Shop at [flutterwow.com](https://www.flutterwow.com)

A VARIETY OF STYLES AND COLORS



## REFLECTION



Nathaniel Noir / Alamy Stock Photo

We are resolved into the supreme air,  
We are made one with what we touch and see,  
With our heart's blood each crimson sun is fair,  
With our young lives each spring-impassioned tree  
Flames into green, the wildest beasts that range  
The moor our kinsmen are, all life is one, and all is change.

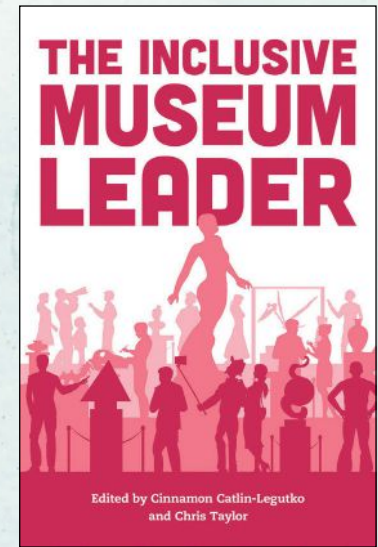
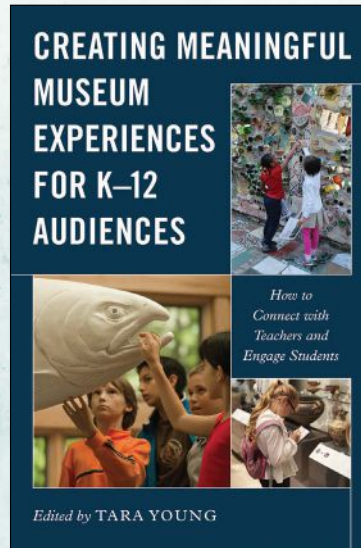
We shall be notes in that great Symphony  
Whose cadence circles through the rhythmic spheres,  
And all the live World's throbbing heart shall be  
One with our heart, the stealthy creeping years  
Have lost their terrors now, we shall not die,

The Universe itself shall be our Immortality!

Excerpted from the poem *Panthea* by Oscar Wilde



# IMPROVE YOUR MUSEUM'S ENGAGEMENT AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE WITH THESE NEW RESOURCES



**NEW**

## COME, STAY, LEARN, PLAY A Guide to Making the Museum Experience

By Andrea Gallagher Nalls

"Nalls provides a timely and comprehensive introduction to the topic of experience, and offers valuable insights into the roles museum professionals can do to support each other and (themselves!) in order to provide an honest, informative, and confident visitor experience. . . warrants a place on every museum professional's bookshelf."—*Rebekah Beaulieu, director, Florence Griswold Museum*

A practical guide to creating amazing visitor experiences for those on the front-line of museums.

October 2021 • 120 pages  
978-1-5381-4663-7 • \$37.00 • Paper  
978-1-5381-4662-0 • \$85.00 • Cloth  
978-1-5381-4664-4 • \$35.00 • eBook

**NEW**

## CREATING MEANINGFUL MUSEUM EXPERIENCES FOR K-12 AUDIENCES

**How to Connect with Teachers  
and Engage Students**

Edited by Tara Young

"Young's book upgrades the 'K-12 museum experiences primer' by offering detailed case studies that highlight the breadth of museum-school engagements and the issues and skills museum educators must grapple with to be successful. It will set an honest, inspiring new standard for learning about museum education."—*Sarah Jencks, director of education and interpretation, Ford's Theatre Society*

A critical look at the "field trip" for school groups.

October 2021 • 288 pages  
978-1-5381-4679-8 • \$45.00 / £35.00 • Paper  
978-1-5381-4678-1 • \$97.00 / £75.00 • Cloth  
978-1-5381-4680-4 • \$42.50 / £33.00 • eBook

**NEW**

## THE INCLUSIVE MUSEUM LEADER

Edited by Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko  
and Chris Taylor

"Offers a refreshingly candid insight into museum leadership for the twenty-first century. The editors and contributors confront the troubling trends in diversity, equity & inclusion work and challenge the reader to deeper more deliberate approach to leadership."—*Noelle Trent, PhD, director of interpretation, collections & education, National Civil Rights Museum*

Practical solutions and opportunities responding to the call for museums to play an active social justice role.

2021 • 216 pages  
978-1-5381-5225-6 • \$48.00 • Paper  
978-1-5381-5224-9 • \$115.00 • Cloth  
978-1-5381-5226-3 • \$45.50 • eBook

**SAVE 20%** when you order at  
[www.rowman.com](http://www.rowman.com) with  
promo code **AAMPRESS20**

ROWMAN &  
LITTLEFIELD



[www.rowman.com](http://www.rowman.com) | 800-462-6420



**American  
Alliance of  
Museums**

2451 Crystal Drive, Suite 1005  
Arlington, VA 22202

A BENEFIT OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE  
AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS

**How can arts  
organizations  
respond to  
challenges such  
as life amid  
COVID-19?**

**A new toolkit  
can help.**



**Navigating Uncertain Times**  
A Scenario Planning Toolkit for  
the Arts & Culture Sector

Overview



October 2020

***Navigating Uncertain Times:***  
***A Scenario Planning Toolkit for the***  
***Arts and Culture Sector*** provides arts  
leaders with a framework to approach  
long-term planning in uncertain times.

Download this report and many more free  
resources: [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org)

Wallace 