

# Designing for Outrage

## Inviting Disruption and Contested Truth into Museum Exhibitions

---

Barbara Lau, Jennifer Scott, Suzanne Seriff

"[W]hile I could not always suppress the violent thoughts that raged inside me, I would nevertheless dedicate my life to seeking alternatives to physical violence, and would wrestle continually with the problem of transforming psychic violence into creative energy."

—20th-century human rights activist  
Pauli Murray, from *Song In a Weary Throat:  
An American Pilgrimage*, 1987<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pauli Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat: An American Pilgrimage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987); reissued with new title, *Pauli Murray: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 58.

Senseless murders, state-sanctioned violence, rampant xenophobia, racism, homophobia, and gender hate crimes vibrate around us. Is there a way that exhibitions can allow people to speak and feel these horrors, so as not to normalize them? Can museums create space for emotional experiences that lie between violation and reconciliation, between pain and forgiveness? Must museum exhibitions rush to feel-good emotions, harmony, or empathy? Can there be space for outrage? How can exhibitions provide this?

We are activist museum practitioners engaged in highly experimental endeavors to catalyze more authentic conversations, encounters, and mobilizations around social justice and human rights issues both within and across our museums and communities. We represent three award-winning sites that aim to startle, puzzle, enrage, surprise, support, and evoke outrage. While many 21st-century museums are searching for ways to



Our goal is to imagine a new set of collaborative, experimental spaces both within and beyond museum walls in which people can practice new ideas of community-building....

create and accommodate more inclusive narratives and more empathetic visitor experiences, we are united in the conviction that such additions to the status quo are not enough.<sup>2</sup> Our goal is, rather, to embrace subversion and forward bold challenges to accepted narratives. Our inspiration comes from the brilliant work of museum scholars and activists at the dawn of the 21st-century who are variously redefining museums in our post-imperial moment as “museums of conscience,”<sup>3</sup> “museums of impact,”<sup>4</sup> and “theatres of pain.”<sup>5</sup> Quoting designer Ralph Appelbaum, one such museum critic, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, argues:

2 Empathy can serve as a tool to preserve the status quo. For a strong argument against empathy and its dangerous biases, see Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016). Bloom argues that empathy is one of the largest motivators of inequality. He contends that kindness does not need to emerge from empathy (feeling the suffering of another person), but should be guided by “rational compassion” (caring for a person and valuing their life without necessarily feeling their pain). Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie also recently pointed out the power imbalance within empathy: “[I]t is an injustice to demand that the maligned identify with those who question their humanity.” See “Now is the Time to Talk About What We Are Actually Talking About,” *The New Yorker*, December 2, 2016.

3 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “The Museum as Catalyst,” keynote address, *Museums 2000: Confirmation or Challenge*, conference proceedings of ICOM Sweden, the Swedish Museum Association and the Swedish Travelling Exhibition/Riksställningar in Vadstena, September 29, 2000, 9.

4 New York City’s mobile “Museum of Impact” defines itself as “the world’s first social justice museum,” with a mandate to “facilitate community curation, believe people have the power to create change and movements, value partnerships, radicalize the museum, nurture the blurry boundaries between art and activism, and celebrate change makers from all walks of life.” See the museum’s website: [www.museumofimpact.org](http://www.museumofimpact.org).

5 Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, “Race and Affect at the Museum: The Museum as a Theatre of Pain,” in *Heritage, Affect and Emotion: Politics, Practices and Infrastructures*, eds. Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton, and Steve Watson (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 34.

Museums can no longer simply celebrate history. “A new honesty” has encouraged museums to “open up for public interpretation the darker side of human society” and to do so more reflexively and self-critically. In this spirit, all museums could become museums of conscience in relation to their own histories, collections, and audiences.<sup>6</sup>

Inspired by these conversations, our goal is to imagine a new set of collaborative, experimental spaces both within and beyond museum walls in which people can practice new ideas of community-building—ideas shaped by the value of being seen, not fetishized; of being whole, not fragmented; of being counted, not surveilled or ignored; of being multidimensional, not simplified or diminished. Believing in the revolutionary and emergent potential of what change theorist Margaret Wheatley calls “communities of practice” we began over three years ago,<sup>7</sup> by creating an informal network with each other, our colleagues, our publics, and our collaborators—sharing experiences, resources, design techniques, learning protocols, and inspiring each other to push boundaries and to let the outrage in.<sup>8</sup> We do not have all of the answers. But both our successes and our failures have provided valuable fodder for discussion and support for what museum studies scholar Andrea Witcomb articulates as a movement

6 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “The Museum as Catalyst,” 9. She quotes Ralph Appelbaum’s lecture, “Anthropology, History, and the Changing Role of the Museum” in Tsong-yuan Lin, ed., *Proceedings of the International Conference on Anthropology and the Museum* (Taipei: Taiwan Museum, 1995).

7 Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze, *Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale* (The Berkana Institute: 2006), [www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/using-emergence.pdf](http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/using-emergence.pdf).

8 The authors initially met through the International Coalition of the Sites of Conscience, a global network of historic sites, museums, and memory initiatives connecting past struggles to today’s movements for human rights and social justice (see: [www.sitesofconscience.org](http://www.sitesofconscience.org)). We have since built an informal subset of sites engaged in subversive practices along with other network partners, such as the Museo Urbano in El Paso (see: [www.dialoguesonimmigration.org/museo-urbano-and-a-living-history](http://www.dialoguesonimmigration.org/museo-urbano-and-a-living-history)), and the Matilda Joselyn Gage Home in Fayetteville, New York (see: [www.matildajoslyngage.org](http://www.matildajoslyngage.org)).

away from “a pedagogy of walking” to a “pedagogy of feeling.”<sup>9</sup>

In this article, we use examples from each of our institutions to suggest approaches, strategies, and challenges for creating experiences and exhibitions that honor and mirror the fragmented, discordant, and disruptive narratives of our oppressive histories and our violent realities. How can we exhibit outrage and the outrageousness that exists? Be insurgent; be intersectional; be cacophonous.

### **Insurgent: Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, Chicago, Illinois**

*“My life matters, my family matters and my community matters.”*

*“F\*\*\* Trump!”*

*“Our options suck.”*

*“I don’t feel represented in this national election.”*

*“I want to give my opinion. I want to be considered. I want to be acknowledged.”*

*“I am told that a protest vote is a selfish vote.”*

*“I don’t want Trump to win, and Black Lives Matter.”*

*“The world needs a change.”*

In October 2016, on the eve of the recent, historic presidential election, museum volunteers shouted these declarations through a megaphone from the second-story window of Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. The museum is a historic site dedicated

9 Andrea Witcomb, “Toward a Pedagogy of Feeling: Understanding How Museums Create a Space for Cross-Cultural Encounters,” in *Museum Theory*, vol. 1, 321–344, volume eds. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message. This is the first of the four-volume set, *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*, eds. Sharon MacDonald and Helen Rees Leahy (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), which provides a survey of the burgeoning field of museum studies.

to the social reformers and radicals of the Progressive Era who founded a settlement house on the west side of Chicago almost 130 years ago. Two remaining historic buildings now serve as the museum.<sup>10</sup> Given that the founders had agitated for social justice, the setting felt right to speak out, to scream out.

The volunteers yelled these statements at the top of their lungs with passion, vigor, and outrage—as if they were their own. But they were not. They were anonymous responses to the first question on an unsanctioned voting ballot that read, “I am voting here because...” The ballots were created, distributed, and, when completed, deposited at Hull-House as part of a newly mounted, insurgent exhibition project: *Official Unofficial Voting Station: Voting For All Who Legally Can’t*, created by artist Aram Han Sifuentes in collaboration with Jane Addams Hull-House Museum and on view from September 8, 2016 to April 24, 2017.<sup>11</sup>

Sifuentes’ project targets all those who are denied voting rights and democratic participation: some of America’s most vulnerable residents, including millions of people who are undocumented, incarcerated, youth under 18 years of age, non-citizen immigrants, residents of United States territories, the homeless; the list goes on. Hull-House served as the center of the project with the

10 For more information on Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, see: [www.hullhousemuseum.org](http://www.hullhousemuseum.org).

11 Aram Han Sifuentes was born in South Korea and immigrated to the United States with her family in 1992. She is a resident alien and the mother of a young American citizen. She is a lecturer in both the Liberal Arts and Fiber and Materials Studies Departments at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a recipient of the 2017 Smithsonian Artists Fellowship. Commissioned by Jane Addams Hull-House Museum (JAHHM), this project is an example of how the museum regularly works with contemporary artists to develop and present rotating exhibitions that connect to historical issues and that also resonate with contemporary concerns, including the themes within this exhibition: citizenship, democratic participation, immigration, incarceration, and voting rights. A non-traditional historic house museum, JAHHM presents contemporary exhibitions that highlight historically marginalized communities and that challenge existing structures and practices that contribute to this marginalization. I’d like to thank the talented Hull-House staff, featured artists and their collaborators for realizing this exhibition. For more information, see: [www.hullhousemuseum.org/vox-pop-the-disco-party](http://www.hullhousemuseum.org/vox-pop-the-disco-party).

fig. 1. Vox Pop: the Disco Party at Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, September 2016.



SARA POOLEY; COURTESY OF JANE ADDAMS HULL-HOUSE MUSEUM

voting station hub and installation, VOX POP: *The Disco Party* (fig. 1). Designed as a collaboration between Sifuentes and her collaborator, artist Lise Haller Baggesen,<sup>12</sup> VOX POP was, said the artists, “a party, a celebration, and a refuge, for all who are disenfranchised.... VOX POP is a protest in celebration of our selves and our voices. VOX POP stands for the voice of the people. VOX POP is where the discounted count. VOX POP is loud to be [an] American.” How can one have a say, when voting is not an option? As Sifuentes and Baggesen declare in their manifesto,

Being non-citizens we find ourselves unable to vote in this election, although many issues in the ongoing presidential debate pertain directly to our own situation, as well as the lives of our loved ones around the world. Being citizens of the world we find ourselves unwilling to sit idly by. In the current political climate, there is too much at stake to simply bite your tongue.<sup>13</sup>

12 Lise Haller Baggesen left her native Denmark to study painting in the Netherlands in 1992, before relocating to the United States in 2008. In 2013, she graduated with a thesis fellowship from the Department of Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her book, *Motherism*, was published by Green Lantern Press in 2014, and since then the book and installation by the same name has toured museums, universities, and art spaces in Europe and North America. She is a resident alien since 2014 and a mother of two young, American noncitizen immigrants.

13 VOX POP: *The Disco Party Where Every Vote Counts* is a manifesto created by Aram Han Sifuentes and Lise Haller Baggesen in July 2016. Part of the manifesto was included as wall text in the VOX POP exhibition.

In addition to Haller Baggesen, Sifuentes collaborated with several other artists in multiple cities in the United States and Mexico who created portable voting stations, and to whom we shipped ballots.<sup>14</sup> Collaborators returned all the ballots cast at these voting stations to Jane Addams Hull-House Museum to be counted on election day, November 8, and placed on view in the installation VOX POP at the museum. When folded, the completed ballots read, “I voted” and “I count” (intro image).

The exhibition unapologetically claimed loudness and demanded notice for those who are usually silenced, invisible, and at the margins. It featured hand-dyed batik fabrics that play on the iconic Americana red, white and blue; a continuously running protest music playlist;<sup>15</sup> a classic disco ball; and pink and purple batik protest banners that flaunt sayings and rallying calls, such as “Voted but Not Counted” and “Speak Up to Get Down.” The voters, ballot counters, and readers who yelled out the museum’s window were also part of the installation; as they shouted, they were

14 Collaborators included: Lise Haller Baggesen (Chicago), Sadie Woods (Chicago), Yvette Mayorga (Chicago), Roberto Sifuentes (Chicago), Elsie Hernandez (Chicago), Verónica Casado Hernández (Baltimore/Washington DC), Lilah Thompson (Philadelphia), Mara Baldwin (Ithaca), Brandon Bullard (Detroit), Maru Mora Villalpando (Washington), Marianne Sadowski (Los Angeles), Erika Fowler-Decatur (Cortland, NY), Benny Lee (Sheridan, IL), Cecilia Aguilar and Erick Fernández Saldaña (Mexico City, Mexico) and Maitea Daehlin (Chiapas, Mexico). You can find more details on the collaborators and their projects at: [www.hullhousemuseum.org/official-unofficial-voting-station-collaborators/](http://www.hullhousemuseum.org/official-unofficial-voting-station-collaborators/).

The exhibition unapologetically claimed loudness and demanded notice for those who are usually silenced, invisible, and at the margins.

cheered on by people at street level who could hear their strong declarations, creating real-time moments of community-building through outrage. With each of these design choices, the exhibition captured the rampant rage, outrage, frustrations, anxieties, powerlessness, and lack of choice that many felt during the 2016 election season—no matter which candidate they supported. Through the exhibition, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum sought to undermine, challenge, and refigure our nation’s representational narratives of inclusion in a subversive celebration of the dispossessed.

Over 2,000 unsanctioned ballots were cast at official unofficial voting stations in cities across the country and in Mexico. People who could vote cast ballots alongside people who could not legally vote.<sup>16</sup> After November 8, the voting stations were transformed into suggestion booths for the president-elect and for the mayor of Chicago, which the museum forwarded to them at the end of the exhibition. Throughout the run of the show, the museum continued related programming which encouraged visitors to challenge the status quo and express their outrage, including protest banner-making workshops and “U.S. Citizenship Test Sampler” sewing classes.<sup>17</sup>

15 Soundscapes for the project were provided by artist Sadie Woods, also know as “DJ Sadie Rock.” See: [www.hullhousemuseum.org/vox-pop-the-disco-party/](http://www.hullhousemuseum.org/vox-pop-the-disco-party/).

16 After collecting and counting over 2,000 ballots from across the country and Mexico, Hillary Clinton won the “Official Unofficial” vote. Votes were counted on November 8 at Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. On that day, a piñata wall was built in collaboration with the artist Yvette Mayorga. Participants helped build the wall, knock it down, and count and read ballots. See press coverage: <http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/hillary-clinton-wins-the-unofficial-election-among-people-who-cant-legally-vote/>.

### **Intersectional: Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice, Durham, North Carolina**

Pauli Murray (1910–1985) was a civil rights activist, an attorney, a poet, a feminist, an Episcopal priest, and an African American same-gender-loving woman, who was outraged throughout her life. She was repeatedly denied access to education, public leadership, and occupational advancement because of her race, gender, and sexual orientation. Outrage is one reaction to feeling the powerlessness of marginalization and discrimination, but as Murray learned, if not balanced by hope, it can destroy. She also found, however, that hope without outrage can engender unbridled idealism.

At the emergent Pauli Murray Center, which will be located in Murray’s family home (and, as of January 11, 2017 the first National Historic Landmark in the United States inspired by an African American LGBTQ woman), we embrace outrage in conversation with hope in all of our exhibition and community engagement work.<sup>18</sup> The goal is to build a center for social justice mobilization using public history, storytelling, and art as primary tools. We are committed to foregrounding narratives that are oppositional to traditional histories focused on

17 Also on view at Hull-House as part of the exhibition were Sifuentes’ ongoing “U.S. Citizenship Test Samplers.” The samplers are the outcome of workshops that Sifuentes has organized with other noncitizens to study the questions on the naturalization test through sewing. Each of these samplers is sold for \$725, which was the cost of the U.S. naturalization application at the time of this publication. The sampler workshops became mini-discussions addressing immigrant rights, labor politics, and everyday concerns of intergenerational and multiethnic people. The museum hosted U.S. Citizenship Test Sampler sewing workshops and ballot counting days throughout the election season. For more information, see: [www.hullhousemuseum.org/us-citizenship-test-samplers/](http://www.hullhousemuseum.org/us-citizenship-test-samplers/).

18 For more information about the Pauli Murray Project and the Pauli Murray Center, visit [www.paulimurrayproject.org](http://www.paulimurrayproject.org).

white, male, Eurocentric achievement and power. Pauli Murray's life story is an example and her scholarship uplifted these narratives throughout her 75 years.

One of Murray's personal strategies was the pursuit of an integrated body, mind, and spirit, resisting a view of her self as a set of conflicting identities. Following her lead, we elevate intersectionality<sup>19</sup>—the idea that systems of oppression based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other marginalized identities are interconnected and better addressed together—in both the design and philosophy behind our work.

Pauli Murray's constellation of identities provides opportunities for many different people to see themselves in her experience, an opportunity we cultivate in our leadership team, our audience development, and in our recent traveling exhibition, *Pauli Murray: Imp, Crusader, Dude, Priest* (fig. 2).<sup>20</sup> The title evokes the monikers Murray chose for herself in a personal photo album (early “selfies,” as it were). She used “imp” to express her rebelliousness; “dude” as a confrontation of the gender norms of her day; “crusader” as an expression of her powerful drive for justice; and “priest” as her arguably more “respectable” pursuit for leadership. In the exhibition, we brought visitors face to face with these enlarged, life-sized images and their charged titles to present the complexity of identity and complicate ideas about memorialization of an accomplished life. Some visitors felt outrage, because they identified with Murray's experiences of oppression. Others

19 Intersectionality is a term coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, critical race theorist and law professor. Much like Murray, Crenshaw recognized the value of viewing multiple human identities as interconnected, especially in the realm of systems of domination and discrimination. See Crenshaw's recent TED Talk at TEDWomen 2016, “The Urgency of Intersectionality,” for an updated version of her pathbreaking work on intersectionality: [www.ted.com/talks/kimberle\\_crenshaw\\_the\\_urgency\\_of\\_intersectionality](http://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality).

20 The exhibition was open from July 2014 to January 2015 at the Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was remounted from August to December 2015 at the Cameron Gallery at The Scrap Exchange in Durham, North Carolina.

were outraged that the exhibit moved beyond her public accomplishments to her personal struggles. For example, because of its association with evil and the devil, they saw our use of “imp” as blasphemous and our use of “dude” as an attempt to inappropriately and publicly associate Murray with the LGBTQ community.

These design and curatorial choices—textual and visual architectures—created a complex, multi-dimensional space that both welcomed and outraged.<sup>21</sup> They also created a moment of learning. We believe that Pauli Murray's multiple identities (fig. 3) and struggles for wholeness parallel struggles in our wider communities to embrace complexity and address “the degradation and dignity of all [our] ancestors,” as Murray prescribes in her family memoir, *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family*.<sup>22</sup>

In public programming, we invited visitors to share their responses to the exhibition, allowing us to hear their ideas and learn about what resonated with them. This was well accomplished in *Speaking Power: A Poetry, Prose and Sermon Slam*. The slam's architecture—timed segments open to anyone who signed up—built a platform for community members to speak their outrage, their hope, and their creative connection to exhibition themes and Pauli Murray's life experience. Audience members were encouraged to respond to the poets and sermonizers in a talk-back format.

Our youngest participant was 14, our oldest was in her seventies; the group reflected diverse identities based on racial and cultural backgrounds, sexualities, socioeconomic classes, and educational experiences. This series of powerful evenings

21 This exhibition design is in line with feminist studies scholar Jennifer Tyburczy's “queer curatorship” model, which she defines as “an experimental display tactic that stages alternative spatial configurations” with an intention “to expose how traditional museums socialize heteronormative relationships between objects and visitors.” See Jennifer Tyburczy, *Sex Museums: The Politics and Performance of Display* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

22 Pauli Murray, *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956).



fig. 2. Pauli Murray: Imp, Crusader, Dude, Priest installed in the Cameron Gallery at The Scrap Exchange, a creative reuse arts center in Durham, North Carolina where it was experienced by more than 10,000 visitors.

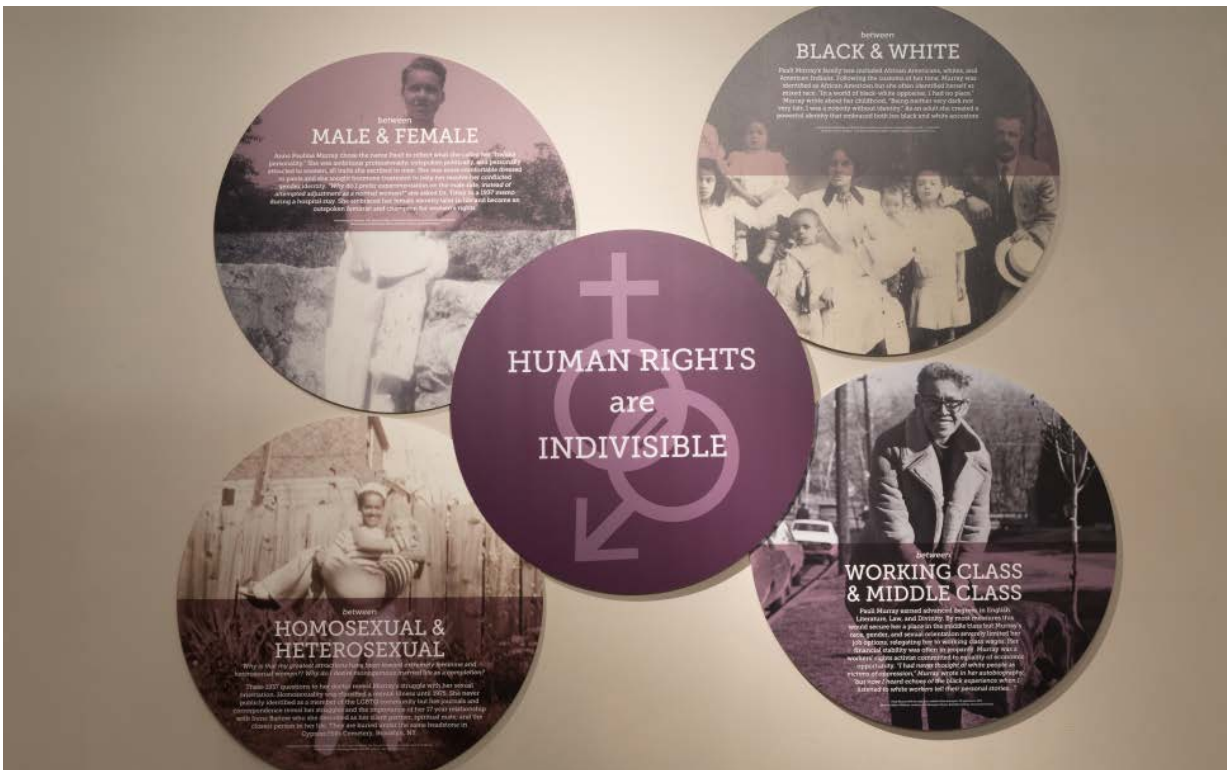


fig. 3. Visualizing intersectionality in a Venn diagram based on Pauli Murray's interconnected identities. From the exhibition Pauli Murray: Imp, Crusader, Dude, Priest.



prompted participants to dig deeper into Pauli Murray’s vision and its relevance to today’s issues. In our estimation, the level and depth of engagement and the willingness of both presenters and audience members to share vulnerabilities and feelings made this a great success.

When our historic site is fully renovated and visitor ready in 2020, lessons learned through experiments like this traveling exhibition and our community programs will shape our strategies to build an organization, an exhibition plan, and a legacy that embraces the paradox of outrage and hope.

### **Cacophonous: Museum of International Folk Art’s Gallery of Conscience, Santa Fe, New Mexico**

At the Museum of International Folk Art’s Gallery of Conscience (GoC), everything is always a work in progress.<sup>23</sup> Inaugurated in 2010 as an experimental space to catalyze important conversations about human rights and social justice issues through the works and words of contemporary folk artists both at home and abroad, the GoC starts from a position of cacophony and disruption—not as a means to an end, but as the end itself. It is a space where visitors, artists and community members are invited to engage, contribute, implore, question, and, above all, speak out. “We must speak out!” South African folk artist and AIDS activist, Maria Rengane, enjoins us, “If you keep silent, you sign your own death warrant!”

<sup>23</sup> The inaugural exhibition in the GoC drew on the words and works of 10 folk art cooperatives from 10 countries around the world which had been accepted into the newly formed International Folk Art Market, held each summer on the museum’s grounds. For more information on the juried market, the largest of its kind in the world, see: [www.folkartalliance.org](http://www.folkartalliance.org). For more information on the Gallery of Conscience at the Museum of International Folk Art, see [www.internationalfolkart.org](http://www.internationalfolkart.org). Also see three featured articles under “Local Learning Focus: The Gallery of Conscience” in the most recent special issue of the online *Journal of Folklore and Education*, *Intersections: Folklore and Museum Education*, vol. 3 (2016), 3–24, <http://www.locallearningnetwork.org/journal-of-folklore-and-education/current-and-past-issues/journal-of-folklore-and-education-volume-3-2016>, as well as “Folk Art and Social Change in an American Museum” by Suzanne Seriff and Marsha C. Bol in *Folklife and Museums: Twenty-First Century Perspectives*, eds. C. Kurt Dewhurst, Patricia Hall, and Charlie Seeman (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017).

Harmony, empathy, completeness—these are the deceptive and deadening seductions of conventional modes of exhibition display.

At the Gallery of Conscience, we interpret Rengane’s “death warrant” as complicity with the status quo. Harmony, empathy, completeness—these are the deceptive and deadening seductions of conventional modes of exhibition display. At the GoC, just the opposite is the goal: objects are liberated from cases; curators are released from their authorial voices; and content is crowdsourced to community members and visitors.<sup>24</sup>

Like a jazz tune, we catalyze the exhibit development process metaphorically with a single melodic line—in our case, a pressing issue of conscience—AIDS, immigration, natural disaster, internment in times of war—and a public call to respond. Our “melodic line” is a limited set of artworks, a few artist quotes and photos taped up on butcher block paper around the walls, and a number of participatory prompts that invite response. Like a jazz artist, we then open the space to artistic amplification, improvisation, and interrogation. We invite local and international traditional artists, community youth, neighborhood activists, and drop in visitors to “riff” off of the initial pieces, adding their own stories, comments, signs, poems, artworks, stitches, and songs (fig. 4). Visitors leave some of these additions on the spot, in response to sticky-note board prompts

<sup>24</sup> In order to facilitate this multi-sectional and collaborative exhibition development process, the GoC is led by a six-member team consisting of three in-house staff members (currently curator Nicolasa Chavez, educator Patricia Sigala, and preparator Bryan Johnson-French), as well as a contract community engagement coordinator (folklorist Chloe Accardi), a museum prototyping consultant (Kathleen McLean), and me, Suzanne Seriff, as GoC director. Team members, along with community partners, collaboratively design, curate, evaluate, and facilitate every aspect of the iterative project and programming.

or interactive activities in the gallery itself. Other additions—community quilts, rap poetry rags, digital stories—are produced collaboratively with New Mexican folk artists and community youth, or neighborhood or social service groups, over the course of months or years. At any one time, the project might support as many as a dozen collaborative spin-offs—artist conversations and residencies; poetry slams and graffiti parties; candlelit ceremonies and immigrant food trucks; maker space workshops and activist marches—which all feed back into the gallery space itself.<sup>25</sup>

The GoC team works hard to keep the gallery’s design intentionally unpolished; everything exists in a rough, prototyped state, ready to be nimbly adjusted, changed, added to, or removed based on visitor response and engagement. Our goal is

<sup>25</sup> Sample a radio segment resulting from one of the GoC’s digital storytelling projects, conducted in collaboration with community partners Youth Media Project, teaching the craft of digital storytelling and the art of listening for a socially responsible world (currently a program of LittleGlobe of Santa Fe, [www.littleglobe.org](http://www.littleglobe.org)) and N’MPower, a community resource for LGBTQ youth in Albuquerque ([www.facebook.com/abqnmppower](http://www.facebook.com/abqnmppower)). The segment weaves a youth’s story in with interview segments from one of the artists featured in the GoC exhibition *Let’s Talk About This: Folk Artists Respond to HIV/AIDS* (December, 2012-January, 2014), <http://www.youthmediaproject.org/2014/02/retablos-a-message-of-hope>.

to constantly ratchet up the level of engagement and emergence—with our visitors, our community members, and each other—until individual engagement with the artworks leads to multiple conversations with each other, which in turn leads to ongoing conversations, engagement, and action in our families, out in our communities, and in the world.

Outrage has been a consistent response on all sides. Staff members, administrators, docents, designers, political officials, and longtime patrons have expressed outrage at the process itself: when a “fact” might appear to be wrong, the artwork might seem “amateurish,” the makeshift labels fail to stick to the walls, the interactives seem to “overshadow the art,” or individual pieces are deemed just too provocative for a “family” audience. One patron complained that one of the GoC exhibits was “the ugliest exhibit MOIFA has ever done!” and a volunteer quipped that “dealing with social issues is getting too far away from the art!”

The outrage expressed by visitors, artists, and community members consistently tells a different

CHLOE ACCARDI:  
COURTESY OF MUSEUM OF INTERNATIONAL FOLK ART



fig. 4. Master folk artists from New Mexico are invited to the Gallery of Conscience (GoC) to riff off of an early prototype of the current GoC exhibition, *Negotiate, Navigate, Innovate: Strategies Folk Artists Use in Today’s Global Marketplace*, with their own stories, thoughts, and comments about the ethical and social issues involved in today’s global marketplace (July 2016).

fig. 5. On World AIDS Day, 2012, a member of N'MPower—a community support and empowerment group in Albuquerque for LGBTQ youth—creates a square to add to a community quilt. The activity is part of the ongoing participatory process of the GoC exhibition exploring folk artists' responses to HIV/AIDS.



SUZANNE SERIFE, COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF INTERNATIONAL FOLK ART

tale. One 16-year-old visitor to our immigration exhibition (*Between Two Worlds: Folk Artists Reflect on the Immigrant Experience*)—the daughter of undocumented workers—was moved to create a poem, whose outrage against the racial profiling of immigrants of color spilled out into the final verse:

“I have a question, ‘If Latin Americans are called “wetbacks” for crossing a river,  
Then what are your ancestors called for crossing an ocean?’”

When we added her poem to the gallery walls, we placed a comment book beneath for visitors to contribute their own messages of outrage or responses to each other on the topic evoked by her work. During our exhibition about HIV/AIDS prevention, education and memorialization, the GoC team hung a local LGBTQ group’s “unpolished,” hand-stitched AIDS quilt (fig. 5) in an honored position next to a professionally framed block borrowed from the national NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt. On opening day, the group’s members were moved to tears. The director of the group echoed their sentiment when he commented:

“We are not artists; we are not talented. We are the people who society says are ‘no one.’ But today we see ourselves here for the first time. Thank you for that....”

And our audiences have commended us time and again for “the brave thing” we are doing in the space. As one visitor commented in one of our regularly held, cued interview sessions,<sup>26</sup> “There should be a place in every museum where you have to commit your own opinions. More museums should get a hold of people emotionally, not just intellectually.” Or as Gretchen Jennings, longtime museum professional and former editor of *Exhibition* wrote in her recent critique of the GoC’s *Between Two Worlds* exhibition, the Gallery of Conscience is “a model of museum practice for the 21st century.”<sup>27</sup>

26 Process evaluation is a critical component of every aspect of our work in the GoC, and the very foundation of the prototyping work upon which it is based. In addition to year-round cued interviews with random visitors, the GoC team holds regular community dialogues, focus groups, written evaluations, and team observations both within the space and out in the local communities—with artists, community members, stakeholding social service institutions, and museum visitors.

27 Gretchen Jennings, “Exhibition Critiques: *Between Two Worlds: Folk Artists Reflect on the Immigrant Experience*: An Exhibition in the Mark Naylor and Dale Gunn Gallery of Conscience at the Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico,” *Exhibitionist* 34, no. 1 (spring 2015): 69–71.

## Conclusion

Museum scholar Eilean Hooper-Greenhill suggests that the museum of the 21st century—what she calls the “post museum”—is not so much a “building” as “a process or an experience—one that legitimates, celebrates, and engages multiple voices, histories, arts, and actions.”<sup>28</sup> In so doing, it engages its constituencies in entirely new ways—not as citizens needing education or reform, or customers expecting good service, but, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests, as people “who register their reactions as producers, not visitors.”<sup>29</sup> Commenting on one such post-museum exhibition project, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states that the result “is nothing less than revolutionary. It is at once museological and metamuseological. That is to say it reflects on the museum. It reflects on what it does. And, it encourages its visitors to do the same.”<sup>30</sup>

Such a radical revisioning of the role of museums, visitors, and staff members is not for the faint of heart. While we all might recognize the challenges for large, established institutions to approximate the processual, disruptive, and collaborative character of these projects, even our own, small-scale incubations have found themselves precariously balanced on the fault line of institutional or stakeholder controversy.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the drawbacks and backlash of this kind of innovative museum work are a regular topic of discussion in our communities of practice, and deserve greater attention in our discipline as a whole.

Yet, we are buoyed by the social innovation work of many others who remind us that real paradigm

shifts do not happen overnight, or in isolation. As Margaret Wheatley wisely cautions, “In spite of current ads and slogans, the world doesn’t change one person at a time. It changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision of what’s possible.”<sup>32</sup>

For us, the common cause and vision for 21st-century museums involves a more confrontational, immediate, and disruptive exhibition discourse about issues that matter in our lives. We propose that designing experiences at the intersection of outrage and hope is one way we can responsibly confront the injustices in our world and engage each other and our neighbors in civic discourse, debate, and action toward positive social change. Indeed, we insist that, in a fundamental sense, outrage IS hope. Insurgence, intersectionality, and cacophonous design are three strategies we have found to be useful as part of our “kit of conscience” to carve these vitally needed spaces to amplify the voices, and share in the outrage, of those who have been systematically devalued, deported, or disenfranchised from our society’s official edifices of power—including voting booths,<sup>33</sup> immigrant gateways, hetero-normative systems, institutions of higher education, and museums themselves. ■

---

**Barbara Lau** is Director, Pauli Murray Project at the Duke Human Rights Center at the Franklin Humanities Institute/ Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. [balau@duke.edu](mailto:balau@duke.edu)

**Jennifer Scott** is Director, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, University of Illinois at Chicago. [scottja@uic.edu](mailto:scottja@uic.edu)

**Suzanne Seriff, PhD** is Director, Gallery of Conscience, Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico and Sr. Lecturer in Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin. [seriff@aol.com](mailto:seriff@aol.com)

28 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 152.

29 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 13.

30 Ibid.

31 See E. Louis Lankford and Kelly Sheffer, *Museum Education and Controversial Art: Living on a Fault Line: Handbook of Research and Policy in Art Education*, for an early examination of the nature of controversy in museum exhibitions (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

32 Wheatley and Frieze, [www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/emergence.html](http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/emergence.html).

33 For an inspiring talk on yet another domain of exclusion based on race, see Amy Hunter’s February 2015 TEDx GatewayArch talk, *Lucky Zip Codes*, in which she chronicles the correlation between educational resources and housing zip codes in American cities, at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdX8uN6vUE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdX8uN6vUE).