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AAM ANNUAL MEETING & MUSEUM EXPO:
PRODUCT PREVIEW GUIDE INSIDE



AAM is thrilled to announce a \$1 Million Investment in the Museum Community!

We're excited to announce the beginning of expanded member professional development and networking programs to benefit all of you—the 35,000 museum professionals in our Alliance who are eager to grow and make new connections.



As early as this summer and over the next several years, you can expect that this investment in the museum community will deliver massive improvements to the AAM member experience and the benefits you receive as a part of our Alliance. From feedback received from thousands of museum professionals, **three areas of focus** were consistently cited as top needs. Here's how we are striving to meet each of these needs this year:

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

Expanded **professional development** programs and resources.

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

We learned from the very high number of responses we received for our first Content Advisory Committee last year! We're using those lessons learned to construct a new volunteer program, and hiring a dedicated staff person to create a robust and sustainable program. In the coming year, you will be able to express your interest in volunteering directly within your membership profile.

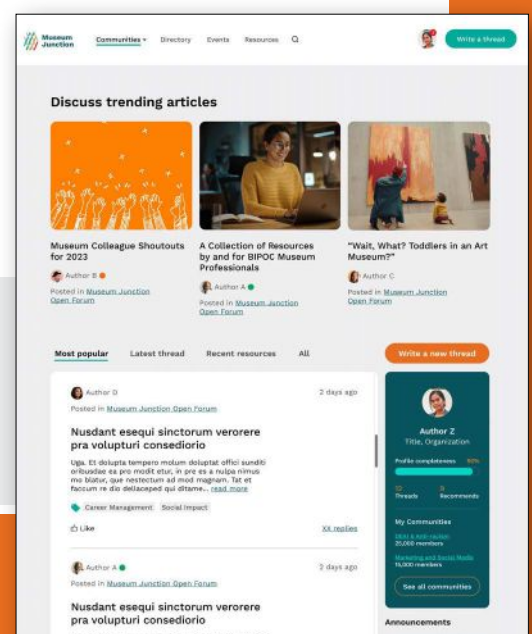
Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents cited a need to access more professional development resources through AAM. This year, we have begun rolling out new on-demand programs, building a team committed to your professional development, and we will be piloting our **first fall virtual event!** More details will be available this summer.

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

Our expanded platform for Museum Junction will allow you to better showcase your expertise and connect with others in similar areas of interest. »

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

➔ bit.ly/museum-community-investment



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MUSEUM

A BENEFIT OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS

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INSURING
THE WORLD'S
TREASURES



Getting Out of the Box

For generations, much of the American public has put museums in a box, seeing them as nice places to visit on occasions like annual school field trips but not community anchors essential to a thriving society.

In recent years, this public perception has become an increasing concern. In the stiff competition for resources, funders have been focusing on utility above all. Government leaders want the tax dollars they earmark to clearly benefit their constituents. Philanthropists want the activities they support to demonstrably address social issues. The good news is, we know museums can and do impact the world in the ways these decision-makers are seeking. Our museum field just needs to build on recent momentum to strengthen, aggregate, and communicate this impact.

For that reason, AAM named advocating for social and community impact a top priority in our 2022–2025 strategic framework. As we developed the framework amid the tumult of the pandemic, we were inspired by the deep commitment museum professionals had shown to their communities, through steps like donating protective gear to health-care workers, stocking food banks from their gardens, teaching remote classes, and helping to demystify and provide comfortable space to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. There was no better nationwide demonstration of all the things museums were doing outside of the old box.

Already, there are signs that this demonstration is transforming the perception of museums. For instance, I was pleased to note that a recent government report outlining a plan to improve health and wellness outcomes, *The Federal Plan for Equitable Long-Term Recovery and Resilience*, mentions museums no fewer than a dozen times. For those in the field, the connection between museums and well-being is established, but this was the first time I'd seen our country's

decision-makers embracing it so enthusiastically. This is only the beginning of the change we want to see over time, but it's a good sign we are making progress. We can't stop our work to break out of the box.

Over the next few years, we have a strategy to define and measure the impact of your work, and then to convey that impact to the decision-makers who need to be convinced. One of the first major steps in this effort is taking place at the 2023 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo in Denver. This year, we have reimagined our long-running conference as a mass dialogue on social impact. With thousands of members expected to attend, every session on the program relates to one of four dimensions of impact—People, Power, Planet, and Possibility—and new formats like workshops and roundtables allow for more participatory discussion and concrete skill-building. With articles derived from sessions on the program, this issue of the magazine is your first look at some of what that conversation will hold.

As we work toward a unified framework of impact, with greater recognition of all that museums can do for the world, we need to hear from you. We hope you'll play an active part in our collective work, whether at the Annual Meeting or through the year-round programs that will be part of our recently announced \$1 million investment in the museum community.

Funders and policymakers are eager to understand the full value of museums. We just need to show them.

3/13/2023



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Lott".

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

Museum-Goers Believe ...

46%

Museums provide a feeling of connection to humanity/what it means to be human.

40%

Museums should be places that help people think critically and build skills to empower civic participation.

58%

Museums should support conservation of our natural world, including reducing the effects of climate change.

Sources: 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers (AAM and Wilkening Consulting)

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



Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts

The Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts (AMFA), the oldest and largest cultural institution of its kind in the state, reopened on April 22, following a historic renovation that has dramatically transformed the museum's main building and grounds in Little Rock's MacArthur Park. AMFA now features flexible programming spaces, indoor/outdoor areas to socialize, and the pathways between the expanded galleries, art school, theater, and modern restaurant are unified by a central, light-filled atrium.

Location: Little Rock, AR
Learn more: arkmfa.org

Boston Children's Museum

In response to, and in support of, needs expressed by parents and caregivers, "You, Me, We" offers adults thoughtful guidance and tools to engage with children as they begin to perceive, explore, and question topics such as identity and fairness. Through playful learning activities, visitors will be encouraged to consider the many influences on identity development, including community, traditions, religion, food, culture, and belonging.

Location: Boston, MA
Learn more: bostonchildrensmuseum.org/you-me-we/

Chazen Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin–Madison

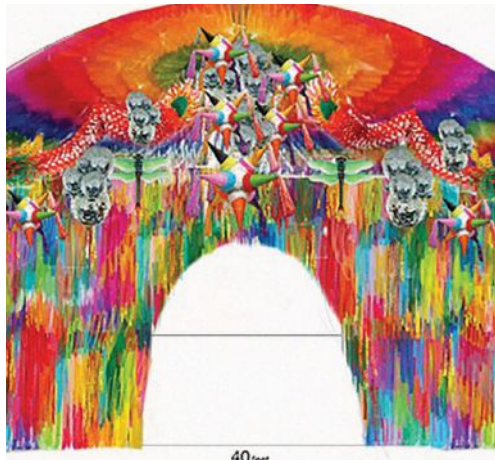
"re:mancipation" is an intensive, multiyear project in partnership with visual artist Sanford Biggers and MASK Consortium. The exhibition highlights the collaborative process of the study and artistic response to the museum's problematic *Emancipation Group* sculpture, seeking to dissect and better understand racism in America.

Location: Madison, WI
Dates: through June 25
Learn more: chazen.wisc.edu/exhibitions/remancipation/

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, and it might be featured in an upcoming issue.

Image by Timothy Hursley; Chris Disario; Chazen Museum of Art/Eric Baillies



Frist Art Museum

“Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature” tells the broader life story of the beloved English author and illustrator. Presented in a playful, colorful, and family friendly installation, the exhibition features rarely seen objects, including personal letters, photographs, books, diaries, decorative arts, sketches, and watercolors that explore the inspirations behind Potter’s stories and characters.

Location: Nashville, TN

Dates: through Sept. 17

Partner: Victoria and Albert Museum

Learn more: fristartmuseum.org/exhibition/beatrix-potter/

High Museum of Art

“HAPPY JOYLANTA,” an immersive environment within a monumental celebratory canopy by designer Tanya Aquíñiga, is the museum’s eighth site-specific installation on the Woodruff Arts Center’s Carroll Slater Sifly Piazza. Drawing on years of Aquíñiga’s collaborative practice, the project explores craft and its multiple connections to culture, tradition, materials, function, and community.

Location: Atlanta, GA

Dates: May 14–Nov. 26

Learn more: high.org/exhibition/happy-joylanta/

Indiana State Museum

“Influencing Lincoln: The Pursuit of Black Freedom” explores the Black community’s fight for freedom and equal rights during and after the Civil War at the national level and in Indiana. The exhibition covers how members of the Black community—national figures like Frederick Douglass or people in Abraham Lincoln’s immediate circle—influenced the president as he moved toward ending slavery and advocating for greater rights.

Location: Indianapolis, IN

Dates: through Oct. 29

Learn more: indianamuseum.org/news-article/influencing-lincoln-the-pursuit-of-black-freedom/

Beatrix Potter, artwork for *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, 1902–07 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, courtesy of Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd.; Tanya Aquíñiga, *HAPPY JOYLANTA*, 2023 © Tanya Aquíñiga; courtesy of Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites



Crossroad Quilters, *Strings in Diamond Quilt*, 2000, collection of the Mississippi Museum of Art; Griselda Rosas, *El punto es que lo intrincado organiza sus fronteras*, 2022, courtesy of the artist and Quint Gallery; National Music Museum

Mississippi Museum of Art

The Mississippi Museum of Art (MMA) has acquired a significant collection of quilts by crafters from Mississippi and beyond, along with works by Randy Hayes, Shani Peters, Edgar Praus, and Willie White. The 131 quilts gifted through the Kohler Foundation greatly enhance MMA's holdings of quilts by African Americans.

Location: Jackson, MS

Learn more: msmuseumart.org/mississippi-museum-of-art-announces-acquisition-of-major-collection-of-quilts-from-kohler-foundation/

Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego

“Griselda Rosas: Yo te cuido” is the artist’s first solo museum exhibition, presenting new textile drawings and sculptural installations that explore themes of inheritance and intergenerational knowledge. Rosas, who is based between San Diego, California, and Tijuana, Mexico, adopts embroidery skills learned from her mother, grandmother, and aunts, often using her young son’s drawings as foundations on which to layer, stitch, and build.

Location: La Jolla, CA

Dates: through Aug. 13

Learn more: mcasd.org/exhibitions/griselda-rosas-yo-te-cuido

National Music Museum

“As Good as Gold: The First 50 Years (1973–2023)” celebrates the museum’s collection of musical instruments and related materials that span five centuries and is today one of the world’s premiere collections of musical instruments. The exhibition will explore the function of collecting in museums with a particular emphasis on how the museum’s collecting originated and evolved.

Location: Vermillion, SD

Dates: through Oct. 31

Learn more: nmmusd.org/nmm-notes/as-good-as-gold-the-first-50-years-1973-2023



NEW RESOURCES FOR MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS



MAKING DINOSAURS DANCE

A Toolkit for Digital Design in Museums

By Barry Joseph



"A wonderful guide to the kind of agile, experimental, responsive operational strategies needed in the museum of the future." —Elizabeth Merritt, founding director, Center for the Future of Museums, American Alliance of Museums

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STORYTELLING IN MUSEUMS

Edited by Adina Langer



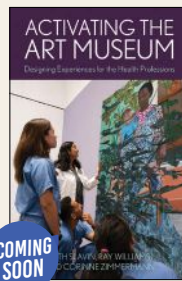
"Taken individually each article provides a single narrative on storytelling within the bounds of the museum walls, but collectively we are provided a glimpse into the challenges and promise of inclusive storytelling and the ethical considerations that should be a part of every level of public history practice in the years to come." —Priya Chhaya, associate director of content, National Trust for Historic Preservation

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Designing Experiences for the Health Professions

By Ruth Slavin, Ray Williams, and Corinne Zimmermann



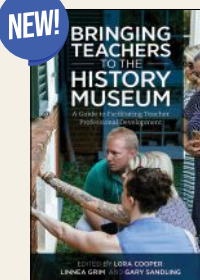
"Written by three renowned museum educators the publication offers keen insights into the need for thoughtful collaborations, approaches to teaching in the galleries and addresses important themes such as empathy, storytelling, nurturing wellness and more that give new insights to this important new field of interpretation." —Bonnie Pitman, director of Art-Brain Innovations, The University of Texas Center for BrainHealth

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BRINGING TEACHERS TO THE HISTORY MUSEUM

A Guide to Facilitating Teacher Professional Development

Edited by Lora Cooper, Linnea Grim, and Gary Sandling



"A well-rounded array of resources, for both newcomers to teacher professional development and even the most seasoned museum professionals. From philosophy and research findings, to strategic reflection prompts and on-the-ground tips, this book will help me and my colleagues enhance the ways we deepen teacher comfort, competence, and confidence in the stories our museums tell." —Stephanie Arduini, deputy director, American Civil

War Museum, and director, Edward L. Ayers Center for Civil War and Emancipation Studies

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TRANSFORMING INCLUSION IN MUSEUMS

The Power of Collaborative Inquiry

By Porchia Moore, Rose Paquet, and Aletheia Wittman



"Much like public schools, public museums are often vexing institutions. But history shows that organizing and struggle works; museums can be moved toward openness and inclusion, as this indispensable and inspiring book details. Its authors declare, 'We must act before the cycle of forgetting begins again' and *Transforming Inclusion in Museums* makes that invitation irresistible." —Therese Quinn, professor and director of museum and exhibition studies, University of Illinois at Chicago

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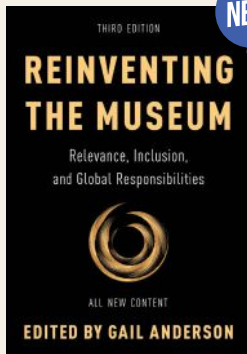
FRIDAY, **MAY 19TH**



1:00-2:00 pm

GAIL ANDERSON

NEW!



REINVENTING THE MUSEUM
Relevance, Inclusion, and Global Responsibilities
Third Edition



3:15-4:00 pm

BRIAN ALEXANDER

NEW!



MUSEUM FINANCE
Issues, Challenges, and Successes

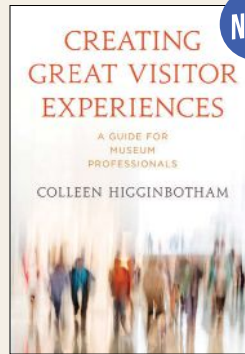
SATURDAY, **MAY 20TH**



9:00-9:45 am

COLLEEN HIGGINBOTHAM

NEW!



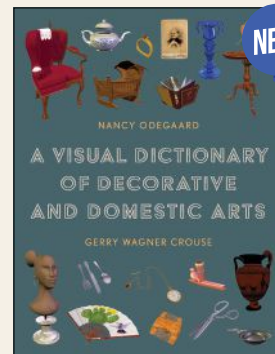
CREATING GREAT VISITOR
EXPERIENCES
A Guide for Museum Professionals



1:30 - 2:15 pm

**NANCY ODEGAARD
(CO-AUTHOR)**

NEW!



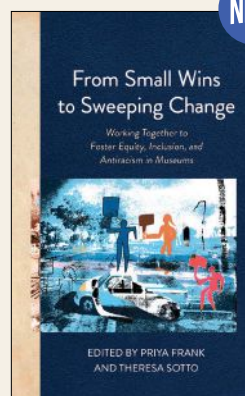
A VISUAL DICTIONARY
OF DECORATIVE AND
DOMESTIC ARTS



12:30-1:15 pm

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Inspiring Reflection

Why and how the perspective and purpose of museums should be widened.

By Emlyn Koster



20/20, a common reference to clear hindsight and normal vision, took an ironic twist as 2020 began. Planning was underway to commemorate the 50th Earth Day—a half century since the world marveled at the first view of Earth from the Moon—just as news organizations began frequent use of the word “existential,” which Dictionary.com presciently chose as its 2019 word of the year. It conveys “a sense of grappling with the survival—literally and figuratively—of our planet, our loved ones, our ways of life,” Dictionary.com said in announcing its choice.

These are not new challenges to the museum profession. At an AAM Annual Meeting during World War II, Albert Parr, Director of the American Museum of Natural History, spoke about “the painful anxiety and uncertainty with which we search for our proper function in the national struggle for a better future.” Looking back at the Depression, Marjorie Schwarzer, author of the 2020

“Earthrise” from Apollo 8 on Christmas Eve 1968, the first photo of Earth from space; in astronaut Jim Lovell’s words, “a grand oasis in the big vastness of space.”

book *Riches, Rivals, & Radicals: A History of Museums in the United States*, noted in a 2009 *Museum* article that “when funds began to flow again ... an opportunity [for museums] to be societal role models for the wisest possible use of resources and talent was lost.”

Arguably, this situation has reoccurred in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and in the continuing aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A geologist before a museologist, I have a big-picture perspective, and my interest in the museum profession intensified as the scope of the geosciences expanded. Geology used to be about the pre-human Earth. In the 1980s, spurred by exploration from orbiting spacecraft, the field’s attention began to shift toward the Earth System—the interconnection of its outer shells of air, water, ice, and life.

Only recently has a more holistically minded geoscience profession included a spotlight on human disruption of natural processes. Climate change has become one of many needed contexts for bringing attention to the fact that we, *Homo sapiens*, are a geologically recent survivor from multiple *Homo* species. Other enlightening

contexts for current museum discussions about diversity are that the Earth’s biodiversity comprises almost nine million species of which only about 6,000 are other mammals, human health depends on environmental health, and a mass extinction of non-human life continues.

Inspiring Reflection

My earliest museum experiences were journeys to other places and about other people in the past. Today, museums are striving to relate not only to their current visitors’ lives and times but also to those audiences they aspire to attract. This shift is profoundly commendable, but gaps between museums’ content and society’s needs remain conspicuous. Museums must also become more holistically minded.

Experiences inspiring reflection are ideal catalysts to societal progress. However, much of the museum sector—arguably the field best suited to this lifelong service—lacks aligned approaches. Institutions often describe themselves as relevant but are seldom pertinent to truly consequential matters. Culture and nature are consciously and inadvertently disconnected. The sciences and



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Inspiring synonyms

- absorbing
- breathtaking
- exciting
- exhilarating
- galvanizing
- intriguing
- rousing
- stimulating

Source: Merriam-Webster

Reflection synonyms

- cogitation
- contemplation
- debate
- deliberation
- introspection
- meditation
- study
- thought

humanities are virtual solitudes. Each museum type functions like a silo with art dominating the popular sense of culture. Operational tactics are often confused with directional strategies. Leadership and staff tensions often boil over into the news.

At the Smithsonian’s 150th anniversary symposium in 1996, Harold Skramstad Jr., Director of Henry Ford Museum, suggested that a mission statement “to collect, preserve and interpret fill-in-the-blank will no longer do” because it does not “answer the vital question of ‘so what?’” In the same vein, the top-rated 2009 TED Talk by Simon Sinek clarified that the success of an organization

hinges on clarity about its *why*, *how*, and *what*—in this order. *Why* specifies its value-driven purpose. *How* specifies its approaches. *What* specifies its outcomes. Most people are drawn to an organization because of the *why*.

The planning language of vision, mission, and strategy was memorably exemplified in the oratory of President John F. Kennedy. On September 12, 1962, he said, “We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.” This was the *why*, his vision. NASA’s planning defined the *how*, the strategy. Astronauts enabled the *what*, the operations.

Urgency and Complexity

In an interview in *Museum* magazine ahead of his keynote speech at the 2011 AAM Annual Meeting, astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson anticipated that “if in 2050 we were delivering the same messages, either we’ve failed at affecting change in society and still needed to give those messages, or we just got left behind and we were no longer on the frontier of what mattered in society.”

A recent Danish survey of 41 exhibitions, all temporary, about the new Human Age of the Anthropocene—a concept introduced in 2000—concluded that most “appear to deliberately exclude significant controversies ... and the predicament of the world from their arenas for reflection.” Echoing her concerned generation, Greta Thunberg has issued this clarion call: “We are alive at the most decisive time in the history of humanity. Together, we can do the seemingly impossible. But it has to be us, and it has to be now.”

The Resistance Museum in Amsterdam, which details the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands during World War II, embraces the nuance and

RESOURCES

Gail Anderson (ed.), *Reinventing the Museum: Relevance, Inclusion and Global Responsibilities*, 2023

Avi Y. Decter, Marsha L. Semmel, and Ken Yellis (eds.), *Change Is Required: Preparing for the Post-Pandemic Museum*, 2022

Elif Gökçığdem (ed.), *Designing for Empathy: Perspectives on the Museum Experience*, 2019

Lotte Isager, Line Vestergaard Knudsen, and Ida Theilade, “A New Keyword in the Museum: Exhibiting the Anthropocene,” *Museum & Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2021

Randi Korn, *Intentional Practice for Museums: A Guide for Maximizing Impact*, 2018

Elizabeth Wood, Rainey Tisdale, and Trevor Jones (eds.), *Active Collections*, 2018

complexity of history to let the public draw its own conclusions. In a January 25 *New York Times* article about the museum, Director Liesbeth van der Horst stressed the need to portray “the lives of victims and perpetrators, bystanders and resisters.” This caught my eye because when composing an article about relevance for *Museum News* in 2006, I chose this excerpt from a book by Lois Silverman and Mark O’Neill: “Perhaps the single most difficult task for the field in the 21st century is ... to find the courage to embrace complexity in museums.”

Elizabeth Merritt of AAM’s Center for the Future of Museums

describes strategic foresight as three actions: “mitigating damage, amplifying good things, and preparing for the next disruption.” I foresee museums also needing to be intentional about their role in the Earth-Human System, being more about issues than objects, confronting ethical dilemmas including decolonization and repatriation matters, exploring intersectionality, and encouraging adoption of the good ancestor and seven-generation traditions of the Indigenous Dakota and Iroquois peoples.

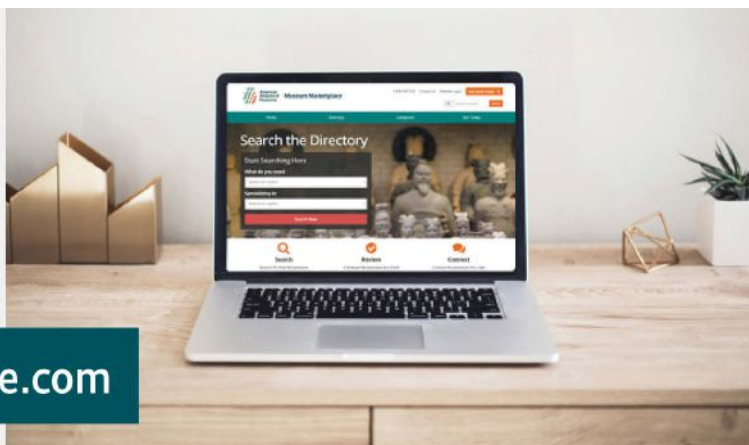
To be both relevant and sustainable, museums—from board meetings to frontline chats—need

to cultivate both their usefulness and popularity with approaches that inspire reflection.

Emlyn Koster, Ph.D, was initially a geologist at three World Heritage Sites and then led four nature and science museums while retaining academic ties. In 2006 he was honored as a Humanitarian of the Year by the American Conference on Diversity. Since 2011, he has focused on raising awareness of humanity’s escalating disruption of the Earth System. Reach him at koster.emlyn@gmail.com.

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A Time of Transformation

As the world becomes increasingly complex, memorial museums can help people navigate uncertainty.

By Alice M. Greenwald

Despite the inescapable reality

of a world continuously reeling from tragic events, unthinkable loss of life, and the erosion of democratic values, we hold fast to centuries-old traditions of

hope and redemption. Is our commitment to these aspirations a manifestation of custom and habit, or does remembrance enable us to navigate the disorientation caused by profound change?

Having spent my career as a

practitioner of remembrance, this question is at the heart of the work to which I have dedicated the majority of my professional life. I served 19 years at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and 16



Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School view the slurry wall at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum on March 7, 2018.

Courtesy of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum

years—first as founding Museum Director and later as President and CEO—at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, from which I have recently retired.

As the end of my tenure approached, I found myself reflecting on what it takes to respond to change—not only the personal change that retirement triggers, but the profound disruptions and unexpected changes that are the constant backdrop of our lives, whether pandemics, unprovoked wars, disastrous weather events, or judicial reversals of established rights.

How should we respond to our changing world? What does it mean to be a leader in a time of transformation? How do you help people deal with the unexpected?

The Healing Power of Memorial Museums

We are living through distressingly turbulent times. But they are hardly unprecedented. As I leave a long career in the museum field, primarily with institutions dedicated to documenting events of mass murder and commemorating the victims of those crimes, I feel compelled to share a few insights gleaned from seminal moments when I witnessed the potential of memorial museums to help us navigate through such times.

The first came at the 1993 dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Like so many of the Holocaust survivors who were among the passionate founders of this great

institution, Elie Wiesel fervently believed that merely telling the story of what happened—facilitating a confrontation with atrocity—would ensure fulfillment of the pledge “Never again!”

Yet, on a dreary, wet April day in our nation’s capital, there he was, standing alongside President Bill Clinton and publicly pleading with him to do something about the atrocities taking place in Bosnia. Already, even on the cusp of the Holocaust Museum opening its doors, “never again” rang hollow.

A memorial museum in and of itself cannot prevent future genocides. But that didn’t mean the museum would be without impact. The moral authority the museum would attain by attesting to the history of the Holocaust would enable it to serve as a platform for heightened awareness and advocacy. As places of active witness, memorial museums can, at their best, serve as catalysts for personal, and perhaps collective, commitment to positive social change. They can affirm, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that hope is neither futile nor naive.

A second seminal moment helped shape my understanding of the potential of memorial museums to be places of healing. Shortly after the 9/11 Memorial & Museum opened, Pope Francis asked to host what he called a “multireligious meeting for peace” in Foundation Hall, the central gathering space inside the museum, which is dominated by an exposed portion of the slurry wall—the retaining wall built to keep the Hudson River out of

the original World Trade Center construction site.

On 9/11, the slurry wall was severely challenged as a result of the attacks, and within weeks, cracks were discovered. Recovery workers spent months reinforcing the wall with anchors, knowing that if it breached, subway tunnels would flood and lower Manhattan would be inundated, making the devastation of an already unthinkable disaster even more unimaginable. But, the slurry wall held, and it became a symbol of strength and endurance, an emblem of the city’s and our nation’s fortitude and resilience.

During his interfaith assembly, Pope Francis stood with clergy from multiple faiths directly in front of the slurry wall. Each spoke or sang prayers from their own liturgies. I found myself listening hard—not so much to the words, most of which were in languages I don’t know—but to a shared intention conveyed by the transcendent and universal language of music.

I had been trained by this project to listen hard. When planning our exhibitions, one of our advisers, a trauma psychologist, had cautioned us to be exceedingly careful about the use of audio recordings in the museum. He explained that nothing is more emotionally impactful than the sound of the human voice. Where film and photos might capture the action, it is in the timbre of the human voice that you feel what another person is feeling.



So, as I sat in Foundation Hall on September 25, 2015, listening to these religious leaders, I could hear in all of their voices what Pope Francis conveyed: “Here, amid pain and grief, we ... have a palpable sense of the heroic goodness which people are capable of, those hidden reserves of strength from which we can draw. ... This place of death became a place of life too.” In selecting the 9/11 Memorial & Museum to be the setting for his interfaith gathering, Pope Francis understood the palpable power of this place to galvanize, inspire, and advance a recognition of our shared humanity and our innate capacity to meet adversity with resolve, resilience, and renewal.

The third insight came in early March 2018, just a few weeks after the horrific shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Approximately 60 students from the school’s Wind Symphony, their band conductor, and parent-chaperones visited the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. Their decision to come to the museum was a deeply personal one. One of the 17 individuals killed in the Parkland massacre had been a member of the band; another was the niece of a 9/11 recovery worker now terminally ill from exposure to toxins at Ground Zero.

We invited a few members of our board to welcome the group. Among them was Howard Lutnick, a 9/11 family member who had lost his brother, his best friend, and more than 650

colleagues in the attack. He told the students that he knew how they felt ... and he wished he didn’t. He told them that well-meaning people would tell them that time heals all wounds, but it’s just not true. He told them that this tragedy, their profound sense of loss, would always be with them. But he also told them that while they would never be the same, they would now live their lives at a deeper level of understanding.

At that moment, I was witnessing the true potential of our institutional mission: an ability to connect with a generation reeling from far too many incidents of extreme violence and senseless loss of life happening in places that were once safe—our schools, our places of worship, our neighborhood grocery stores.

By telling our story, we could help them navigate a world filled with uncertainty and with change so rapid that it feels intensely threatening and destabilizing. We could offer that deeper level of understanding, not just about what happened here at this site, but about fundamental things human beings have been trying to make sense of for millennia: life’s unpredictability, the randomness of evil, our innate capacity for selflessness, the spiritual defiance of hope. We could help them reimagine the unimaginable.


Reasons to Hope

As all of us struggle to adapt to this rapidly changing world of seemingly insurmountable

and unexpected challenges, as leaders try to lead during such complex times, and as parents strive to guide their children to productive and responsible adulthood in a century fraught with turmoil and tension, what I learned from memorial museums might well provide a useful road map, leading to fundamentals we should all take to heart.

- Accentuate the authentic.
- Talk straight and tell it like it is.
- Present the evidence and be clear about the facts, no matter how difficult they are to confront.
- Encourage empathy.
- Listen hard to all sides of the argument—and don’t shut down because you disagree.
- Explain your decisions with compassion.
- Be honest; truth matters.

And, above all else, challenge the darkest of days with the brilliance of light: tell the stories that leave people with hope.



Alice M. Greenwald recently retired from the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, where she served as President and CEO. She is now principal of Memory Matters, LLC, providing strategic advice to museums, memorial projects, senior executives, and boards. Reach her at alice.m.greenwald@gmail.com.

Product Preview Guide



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- MuseumExpo will be open **Friday, May 19** and **Saturday, May 20** and will be packed with opportunities to meet and hear from companies at their booths and in the Solutions Theaters.
- MuseumExpo is also home to content sharing in the Poster Showcase and NeighborHubs. There will be book signings at the AAM Booth and countless ways to connect with new and old friends in the Networking Lounges and during the MuseumExpo Opening Reception and food and beverage breaks.
- **NEW FEATURE**
On **Sunday, May 21**, join commercial leaders for shared conversations on timely industry trends to include the **Emerging Technology Demo** on NFTs, the Metaverse, and Web 3.0 and Industry Presentations (see online program for locations and times).
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Born in 1966 near Paris, Laurence Saunois has always drawn. At 17, her artistic portfolio was accepted at the Beaux-Arts de Paris but her application was declined. She was simply too young. For 10 years, she would not touch a pencil. But one Christmas, a friend gave her a box of oil paints, a canvas and some brushes, and it was a revelation. She discovered color and the pleasure of painting. In 1997, she left Paris and the security of a responsible job to settle in the Southwest of France, in a region known for its dramatic cliff-top villages, medieval religious enclaves, and unusual rock formations . . . and this radically changed her life. There, she restored her grandfather's house, created a 6,000 sq. meter landscape garden, and painted.

"Ce que je fais sera l'impression de ce que je ressens." ("What I do will be the impression of what I feel.") Claude Monet

C'est exactement ce que j'ai ressenti lorsque j'ai visité le jardin d'eau... et j'ai été bouleversée parce que j'ai vu." ("That's exactly how I felt when I visited the water garden . . . I was overwhelmed.") Laurence Saunois

NYMPHEUS LUMINANSIS is available for display in North America in 2026 and after.

For further information & updates visit: laurencesaunois.net/nymphesus-luminansis-colors-light.html

The North American Tour is produced by David J. Wagner, L.L.C. To book NYMPHEUS LUMINANSIS, or for further information, email davidjwagnerllc@yahoo.com or phone 414-221-6878.

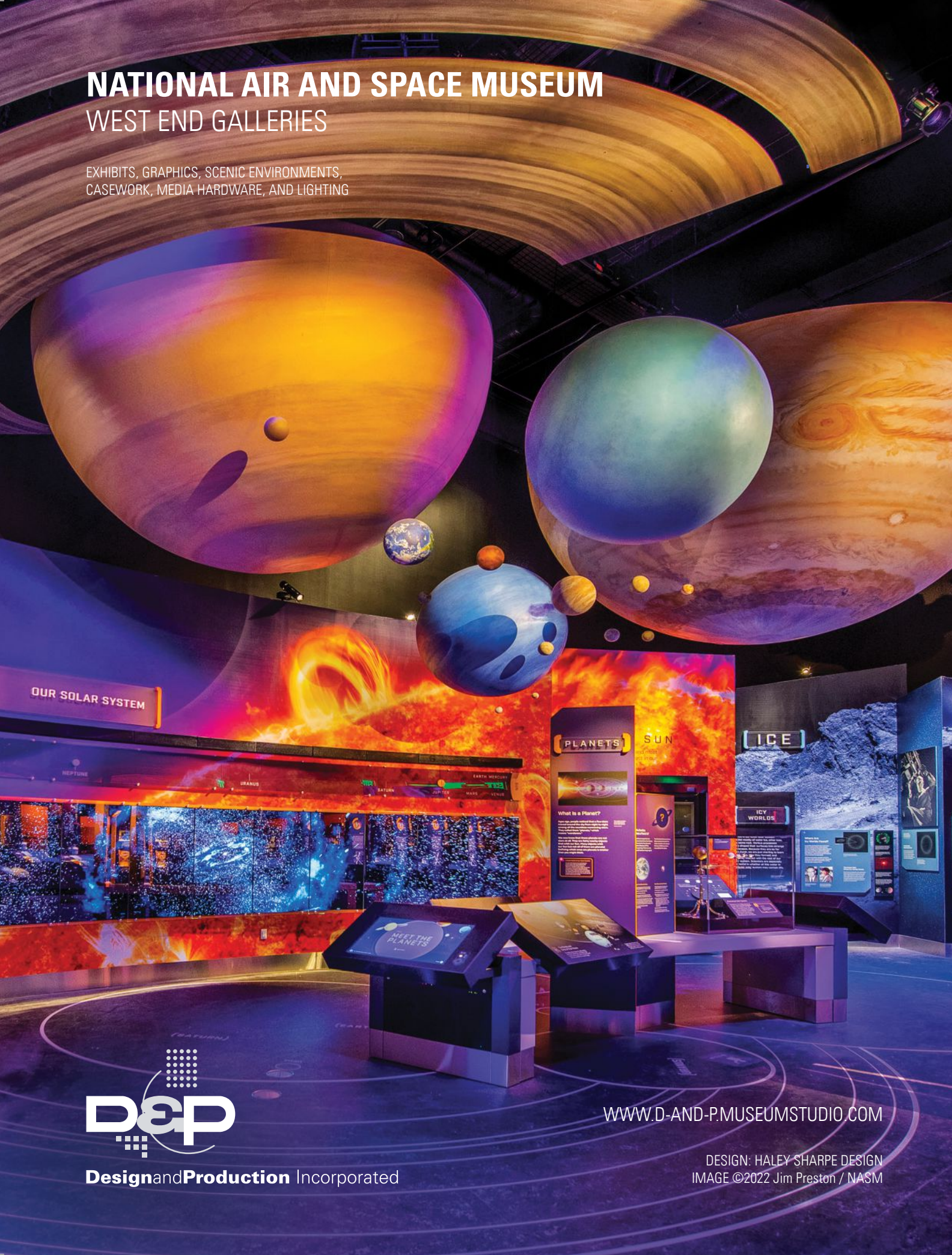
It is in the town of Figeac, in the Occitanie region of southern France, that the artist lives and works on her water lily paintings. The city, with its medieval streets, wood-paneled houses, and buildings from the Middle Ages, has preserved its Old-World charm while smartly blending it with modernity. The Musée Champollion, les Ecritures du Monde, for example, is devoted to the origins of the written word in all its diversity, and rightly so, since it is located in the birthplace of its namesake, Jean-François Champollion, who deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphs and was a founding figure in the field of Egyptology.



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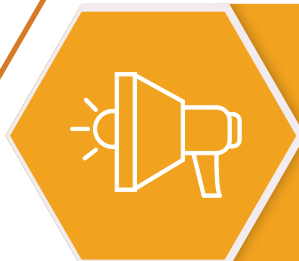
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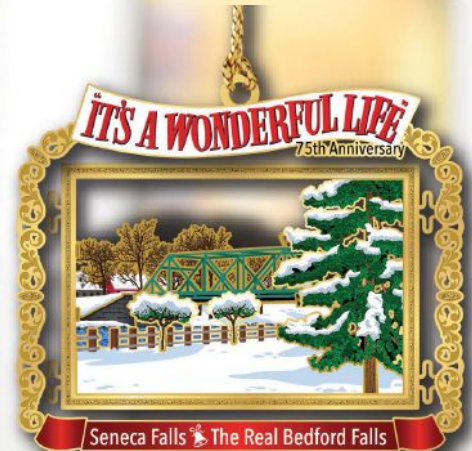
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- contributed nearly **150** pieces of thought leadership, from blog posts and articles to tipsheets and guidelines,
- reviewed nearly **500** #AAM2023 session proposals,
- organized **dozens** of virtual and in-person events at the Annual Meeting to help people connect,
- and so much more!

From all of us at AAM...

Thank you

to the Alliance volunteers and the many others volunteering passionately in the museum field!

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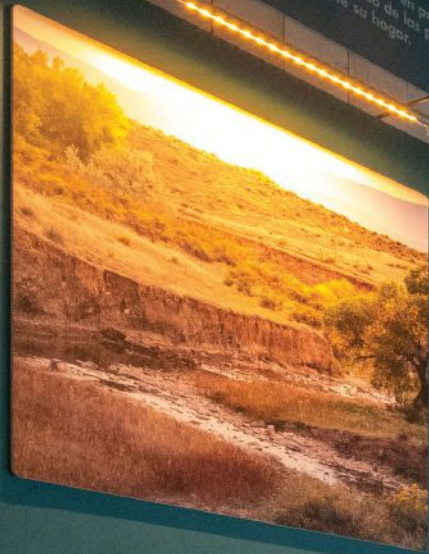
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Love in the Time of Climate Crisis

The case for using emotion and metaphor in exhibition design.

By Jen Tobias

A lounge area in the "Welcome Home" exhibition at Denver Botanic Gardens invites visitors to relax and get better acquainted with their neighbors, human and non-human alike.



At the end of 2019, Denver Botanic Gardens opened “Welcome Home: Meet Your Habitat,” a semi-permanent exhibition that connects biodiversity, natural resources, and climate change. Developed by an interdisciplinary team that included biologists, art curators, botanists, and horticulturists, “Welcome Home” tests the idea that an exhibition can be a solution to a problem. But it’s also a love letter, an act of devotion illuminating the beauty and dazzling complexity that make the natural world worth fighting for.

Combining multimedia interactives with more than 50 specimens, “Welcome Home” is a story about the objectivity of data made meaningful through the subjectivity of feeling. Research indicates that subjective personal experience yields deep and lasting connections to ideas, not simply comprehension. Where climate change is concerned, this may be particularly true. Studies suggest that the human inclination to believe information that best aligns with preexisting beliefs and values is a significant barrier to climate change education. Confront someone with data that’s

in opposition to what they believe, and you’re likely to further entrench what they already thought to be true.

How then, when science speaks the language of data, can museums talk about climate without activating the bias of belief? For “Welcome Home,” the solution relies on the human motivation to integrate information into our identities—emotion. Emotion sometimes feels like an unloved stepchild in scientific interpretation, inferior to intellect and best eliminated where possible. But emotion is not secondary to cognition—it is itself cognition, the model that allows us to make meaning of our knowledge, thoughts, and experiences.

Letting Emotion Guide Design

The primacy of emotion is evident not just in studies of climate change communication, but in our own evaluation as well. For example, when prompted to analyze example information, focus group participants instead often responded with emotional connections, preferring content that reminded them



Specimens representing plants, fungi, and animals (including humans) intermingle in the “Welcome Home” exhibition.



Visitors gaze at paintings by Kevin Sloan in the “Radiant Season” exhibition at Denver Botanic Gardens.

of fishing trips, their home garden, or beloved pets. The message was clear—even in intellectual analysis, visitors couldn’t help but feel.

As a result, “Welcome Home” embraces the messy emotion of subjective experience. It’s designed to provide visitors with not only information, but also opportunities to fall in love with the beauty and strangeness of nature; an experience that uses how it feels as entry into what it means.

Emotion was a lodestar guiding the exhibition’s design, intended to support both affective and cognitive outcomes. The graphics are lyrical and gently nostalgic, and specimen cases are lit with a warm glow. Language and word choice highlight kinship—you might be friends with “cows,” but you might not bat an eye at the slaughter of “cattle.”

Specimens themselves also play a key role in emotional expression—among them are objects representative of humans, animals that ironically don’t get as much attention in biodiversity interpretation. A rubber ducky is displayed alongside blue spruce pine cones (*Picea pungens*) and a crow skull (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) to illustrate the variety of residents in urban habitats; a pair of neon yellow sunglasses finds its place between earth star fungi (*Gastrum smardae*) and a branch from a Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) to reveal the different kinds of organisms you might meet in a pinyon-juniper shrubland.

Placing human objects among rather than above other organisms yields opportunities for empathy that make the abstraction of biodiversity and climate more tangible, transforming the strangeness of the non-human into the familiarity of friends. It may be a stretch to ask visitors to care about how bugs fare amid rising temperatures, but introduce them to the quirky and charming behaviors of a particular beetle, and suddenly it’s easier to argue that they should care about how climate affects their new friend.

In “Welcome Home,” this invitation to friendship is followed by opportunities to act on it. Resources about economically attainable ways that visitors can support biodiversity and resource stewardship—reconsidering food choices, planting pollinator gardens, and similar actions—are featured prominently in a dedicated space. This idea of empowerment was also a clear emotional theme in the initial visitor evaluation—no one wants to feel helpless in the face of crisis.

Nearby, a wall invites visitors to write about a natural place that they love and what they can do to help care for it. The answers are beautiful, funny, and sometimes heartbreaking, an aggregate of deep feeling and memories that tie us to the natural world.

Making the Unimaginable Comprehensible

Taken together, these exhibition experiences immerse visitors in a central message—your house, your neighborhood, your state, your planet are habitats



MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

Creating experiences that speak to each visitor's current level of engagement with environmental issues is a powerful way to unite emotion and comprehension. At Denver Botanic Gardens, these are some of many ways we meet people where they are.

Citizen science: projects that allow visitors to contribute their own data to real scientific work, including plant phenology and pollinator observations.

Botanical art classes: experiences for artists of any level that connect the beauty of nature with the joy of creative exploration.

Science chats: informal, volunteer-led conversations that illuminate science topics through social interaction and demonstration.

Visitors share the wild places they love, and what they'll do to protect them, in the "Welcome Home" exhibition.

shared with friends and neighbors, human and non-human alike. Indeed the idea of scale—that “home” is both micro and macro—is one that’s carried throughout the exhibition. It’s also one that immediately presented a key challenge. How can you tell a story so vast that it encompasses the lives of every single person on the planet, every species, even the planet itself?

From a storytelling perspective, climate change is a narrative of truly cinematic proportions, a story in many ways about the end of the world as we know it. As a result, exhibitions about the subject can become mired in complicated details and information, caused not only by the complex and technical webs of data that describe the problem but the scale of the problem itself.

A system so big it becomes invisible to those inside it is its own kind of heuristic issue, in part

because of the abstraction required to describe it. Scientists theorize that the human brain struggles with the enormity of climate crisis in part because our cognition is adapted to reflect the timescale of our individual lives. Perhaps it is simply not equipped to easily grasp events that must be understood across centuries and millennia.

Luckily, the history of science communication offered a solution for “Welcome Home”—analogy, simile, and metaphor. Metaphor may seem more like a poetic device than a tool for understanding scientific ideas, but it’s a powerful mechanism for translating concepts that don’t easily scale to daily experience. Pick up a science textbook and you’re apt to find all sorts of similes and analogies—particles are like billiard balls, cells are tiny factories.

In “Welcome Home,” metaphor is applied as a thinking tool to guide exhibition design. Not every

element overtly addresses biodiversity and climate change; rather, each component offers a scalable conceptual model revealing the underlying principles. This holistic vision is the priority—take pikas, for example. If a visitor leaves knowing that these fuzzy, hamster-like creatures rely on alpine flowers for food, that’s great. But if they leave understanding that in some complex but tangible way they share resources and perhaps even a broader fate with pikas, that’s even better.

As a result, the structure of “Welcome Home” itself follows the theme of interconnection, with information and organisms subtly repeated across bite-sized stories that are each a unique facet emblematic of the whole. One interactive suggests that there are lessons about empathy and resource stewardship to be learned from the fact that leaf-cutter bees, magpies, and humans all build homes out of plant materials. A nearby pedestal features plastic trash pulled from Denver’s Platte River in a display reminiscent of oversized snow globes—an analogy for the long-lasting and inescapable impact that human activities have on the planet. As with any allegory, these are sometimes inexact—not all humans use wood to build homes, for example—but these stories act as a conceptual framework for the complexity of interconnection, allowing visitors to apply their own experiences.

The unique power of emotion and allegory as entry into climate and biodiversity science is not limited to scientific interpretation. Art experiences can approach the same problems, appealing to visitors who may find scientific exhibitions, however emotive, un compelling. In a 2021 exhibition at Denver Botanic Gardens, for example, visitors were moved by painter Kevin Sloan’s luminous and poignant portraits of plants and animals that illustrate the fragility of the natural world. In a different gallery, visitors lingered in wonder over the sculptures of Judy Guralnick, strange and beautiful fusions of sprouting plants, fungi, porcelain figurines, and books—objects that contemplate how the natural and constructed worlds collide and interact.

Exhibitions like these use a similar emotional strategy to make the immense changes taking place around us understandable. Like “Welcome Home,”


they contextualize the value of what climate change endangers. After all, how can you save something that you don’t truly see? Why should you fight to preserve something that you don’t love?

Keeping It Real

Successful climate crisis messaging also requires acknowledging the paradox of hope and despair—it’s foolish to pretend that climate news is anything but dire, and the enormity of the natural, economic, and political systems surrounding us are far beyond our individual control. But we also have influence within the web of collective activity and relationships that surrounds us, a network that is sometimes able to amplify outcomes beyond our individual capacity.

This is not to say that museums should promote feel-good remedies of questionable impact, especially given that AAM survey data indicates that visitors rely on museums for credible climate information. Encouraging visitors to reduce their individual impact can feel empowering, but it’s equally important that they also understand the role they can play in collective action. As such, the role of museums and botanical gardens in the time of climate crisis is plural and responsive. Museums must act as a source of accurate information but also emotional experience; museums can be a place of solace and joy in a time of environmental sorrow.

This may take many forms—an orchid striking in its alien beauty, a painting that surprises with a new perspective on a familiar landscape, a funny interactive experience that suggests we have more in common with dung beetles than we realized. Perhaps the real lesson for museums in the time of climate crisis is this: climate education must be much more than information. It can be an act of love for our communities and visitors, a place to venerate and escape into the beauty of the natural world, and a powerful testament to the value of what it seeks to protect.

 **Jen Tobias** is Associate Director of Exhibitions & Art Collections and Curator of Art at Denver Botanic Gardens in Colorado. Reach her at jen.tobias@botanicgardens.org.



Robert Boone's *Crossroads*, 2022, was part of "The Promise," an exhibition at the Speed Art Museum that was the culmination of a research and art-making program by the same name for Black community members affected by gun violence.



Robert Boone
Crossroads
2022
Mixed Media
100 x 100 x 100 cm

Delivering on the Promise

The Speed Art Museum and outside experts developed a multidisciplinary program to explore the impact of race-based trauma and gun violence in Louisville.

By Toya Northington, the Speed Research Committee, and Roberto Visani

“What if we could use an art project to bring attention to the excessive amounts of guns in the Black community and the adverse effects?” This question, asked by former Speed Art Museum Steering Committee member and current Kentucky State Representative Keturah Herron, led the museum to develop “The Promise,” a research and art-making program to facilitate healing, reflection, and creative expression for African Americans in Louisville affected by gun violence.

Part of Speed’s Community Connections workshop series, “The Promise” builds on the public engagement framework that grew out of the museum’s 2021 exhibition “Promise, Witness, Remembrance,” which reflected on the life of Breonna Taylor, her murder by the police in 2020, and the subsequent year of protests in Louisville.

“The Promise” taps into the Speed Steering and Research committees, which were created to employ community voice to inform presentation, programming, and community engagement around “Promise, Witness, Remembrance,” and the University of Louisville’s commitment to engage with the Black community to build trust, listen to their priorities, and offer programming reflecting their experiences. In addition to a 12-week workshop series, “The Promise” also offered community engagement experiences and an exhibition of the works created in the workshop.

Starting with Community Feedback

“The Promise” was stewarded by the museum’s Research Committee, a Black-led partnership led by Toya Northington, the Speed Art Museum’s Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Other members

include Dr. Emma Sterrett-Hong and Dr. Lesley Harris, faculty from the University of Louisville School of Social Work; Dr. Jelani Kerr and Dr. Gaberiel Jones, faculty at the University of Louisville School of Public Health; and Dr. Maurice Gattis, faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work. This team designed research methods that capture the project's impact on participants' emotional and social well-being and its public health or social justice impact.

Before the project began, administrators at the Speed spoke individually with multiple stakeholders, including activists, psychologists, politicians, and the police department to hear their thoughts, fears, and perspectives. The project began with a listening session with the Steering and Research Committee members, artists, and activists. Participants discussed their experiences with gun violence, and the activists reflected on how it informed their work. Program leadership articulated the project's purpose and solicited feedback.

Toya Northington's *Charms, Curses & Crossings*, 2022, was part of "The Promise" exhibition.



The conversation revolved around four themes. First, Black people have a complex relationship with firearms. This is exemplified in firearms' role as a slave trading commodity, prohibitions against gun ownership during the antebellum era, and the flood of guns into Black communities during the crack epidemic. Second, guns can represent protection, and efforts to disarm the community may be viewed unfavorably, particularly given state and local context. Third, law enforcement behavior is often detrimental to community interests. Specifically, firearms are often recycled into the community through police auctions, captured guns are often unrelated to the crime that was committed, and gun rights are often subverted by assigning weapons charges to innocent people in the vicinity of gun-related probation violations. Finally, community services and intervention are needed to address gun violence.

The listening session set the tone and direction for the workshop curriculum and community engagement events. Instead of focusing on the museum or its art collection, we wanted this program to bring attention to a social issue with the hope of improving the mental health of Black community members. This was new territory for our museum, but we were building on the confidence we gained during the "Promise, Witness, Remembrance" exhibition.

To lead the program, Northington contacted Roberto Visani, a Black, Brooklyn-based multimedia artist who has exhibited internationally, has been awarded prestigious residencies, and possesses a range of experiences as an art educator and artist working in community and institutional contexts. He had an experience with gun violence and has used guns as material and content in his studio practice for over a decade. Visani accepted the offer and joined the Research Committee to help plan the workshops, community engagement events, and the exhibition.

Workshops for Art-Making and Healing

Following the listening session, Visani, Northington, and Research Committee members created a 12-week workshop that began in March 2022 and alternated between in-person and Zoom sessions. Participants researched the history and impact of guns and gun violence on Black communities, examined how these

topics are expressed by visual artists, and created their own art reflecting their experiences.

There were multiple points of entry for the workshop participants to express their creativity, though photography was the main medium because cellphone cameras have made it accessible and popular. In the sessions, participants shared their perspectives on the lessons and used photos generated through weekly prompts to convey their ideas in a research process called PhotoVoice.

PhotoVoice is a way to hear about people's thoughts and experiences through their eyes and their words. The process also allowed participants to connect meaning and content to their images.

Iron sculpture was the second medium we used due to its physicality and the potential to turn a material that causes pain into something hopeful and meaningful. Originally, the workshop planned to use firearm parts donated through a gun drive as art material; however, local policies prohibited the use of firearms as artistic material, so the museum purchased scrap metal. That metal was used in the culminating workshop, which was a community event at a foundry in Portland, a diverse neighborhood in the West End of Louisville, where participants created molds into which the iron was poured.

In addition to art-making, critical conversations around grief, gun violence, and racial healing were embedded within the workshops. The framework for these conversations centered on: 1) enabling people to document and reflect community strengths and concerns (the sessions were recorded and analyzed in order to develop intervention strategies on root causes of gun violence); 2) promoting dialogue about community issues through discussions of their art, and; 3) influencing policymakers to facilitate changes deemed necessary by the community.

Visani cofacilitated each workshop session with Dr. Gabriel Jones Jr., a community-engaged researcher whose work focuses on the impact of structural violence on Black communities. He had previously worked with community members on the PhotoVoice project "It Could Have Been Me" during the "Promise, Witness, Remembrance" exhibition.

Dr. Jones suggested including mental health



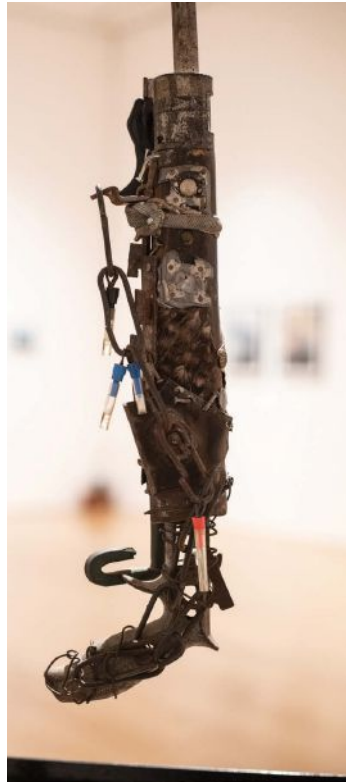
Participants at the museum for "The Promise" Community Day.



components in the sessions to help participants navigate the complex race-based trauma associated with structural and interpersonal violence. In the first session, for example, participants acted out trauma with guns, linking collective experiences of trauma through role-playing. Other sessions focused on a historical overview of guns, how they are used as currency, and more. Together, the team did an excellent job making sure everyone felt seen and heard. Using her social work training, Northington offered an optimistic or affirmative ending to each session so that participants



Shauntrice Martin and Roberto Visani at the iron pour event that was part of the program.



Roberto Visani's *Weight*, 2001, was featured in "The Promise" exhibition.

collective healing. This involved numerous short pre-session and post-session participant surveys, including a race/ethnic-based discrimination survey to gain an understanding of their experiences of discrimination and then a race-based trauma-anxiety survey to determine how those experiences made them feel.

Findings indicated that participants' moods improved after eight of the nine sessions, thus indicating that the arts-based healing activities made positive contributions to their well-being. This suggests that art-based workshops are a relatively low-cost intervention to improve the physical and mental health outcomes of communities that experience high levels of trauma and gun violence.

The Culminating Exhibition

The workshops ended with a public arts-advocacy exhibition at the Speed Art Museum from August 19–October 23, 2022, that included artworks created by participants as well as Visani and Northington. Visani and Northington also curated the exhibition in consultation with the participants, helping them create a personal platform to share their opinions, experiences, and creativity with a public audience.

For all of the participants, this was their first experience creating a museum exhibition, and

would not leave in a bad place.

Very little scientific evidence exists about how an arts-based healing group focused on race-based trauma and gun violence could impact participants' well-being. Therefore, the Research Committee devised a data collection and analysis plan to examine participants' experiences with art-making and

THOUGHTS ON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Take advantage of interdisciplinary partnerships. For "The Promise," the Speed Art Museum worked with experts in public health, clinical psychology, social work, and fine art. We found that members of each discipline came forward to safeguard different aspects of the project. For example, the research team facilitated the data collection at several levels: conceptualization, agenda, and priority setting when we met with community-based organizations working on gun violence. Every member of the team was dedicated to elevating community voices through different domains of the project.

Look toward the future. When building trust, it's not what you say, but what you do that matters. By continuing to engage with your community partners, your institution can create environments and art experiences that allow marginalized groups in the community to feel seen, valued, and heard. Deep and reciprocal relationships that can foster long-term and systematic change are built over time.

we wanted to engage them in every aspect of the process. Doing so also allowed Visani to discover art pieces that were strong in composition, technique, and content that the participants may have otherwise overlooked.

Because the curators had an intimate knowledge of the artworks produced during the workshop, and had worked with the artists involved, they were able to create thoughtful installations for each work. One example is the series of photographs by Pastor Brown documenting shrines honoring gunshot victims throughout Louisville. The photographs were displayed on the far wall of the gallery in a large cross that echoes the makeshift crucifixes depicted in the photos. Installation of other works took a similar approach, allowing the content to inform the artwork's presentation.

Community Engagement Events

Community Day at the Falls Art Foundry on June 18, 2022, brought community members and workshop participants together to create cast-iron artwork. This was a family friendly event that included free food trucks, a disc jockey, and opportunities for all ages to create molds into which the iron was poured. When the blocks cooled, the participants could take them home.

People came from all over greater Louisville and engaged with local residents and other community members they were unlikely to meet in any other environment. This also broadened the project's art-making process, linking these participants to "The Promise" exhibition.

We held another Community Day event on September 25 at the museum, drawing attention to the exhibition. It featured daytime and evening activities that were an eclectic mix of music and performances; food and drinks; yoga and wellness events; a panel discussion with local artists, poets, and activists; and several intimate conversations about why we developed "The Promise." A diverse audience participated in the conversations, reflecting on their own experiences, fears, and biases about gun violence.

The research team and Visani are currently working on plans for "The Promise 2023." We are brainstorming ways to reach new audiences, including



Participants at "The Promise" Community Day.



local youth groups and people who are incarcerated, and/or developing a bi-city effort with our partners in Pittsburgh. In addition, the museum received an NEA research grant to analyze the survey information and common themes identified during the workshop sessions and share those findings with local community members, museums, and academic communities.

With "The Promise," participants became catalysts for personal and community change through art-making and dialogue, and we aim to continue and build on that work.



Toya Northington is Director of Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging at Speed Art Museum. **The Speed Research Committee** is a multidisciplinary team of experts to spur community engagement. **Roberto Visani** is a multimedia artist and educator.



All photos by Dakota Mece

From Cultural Appropriation to Cultural Appreciation

Lessons from the Center for Design and Material
Culture at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

By Sarah Anne Carter, Carolee Dodge Francis, Joseph Jean, Carolyn Jenkinson, and Dakota Mace

Foreground: Students and staff engage with Helen Louise Allen Textile
Collection objects as part of the “From Cultural Appropriation to Cultural
Appreciation Workshop”; background: a ca. 1930 mola blouse, made
and worn by Guna women of Guna Yala, Panama.





In the curriculum, students compare a ca. 1930 mola blouse, made and worn by Guna women of Guna Yala, Panama, with printed, quilting fabric yardage manufactured in 1977 by Pago, Inc.

For more than 50 years, the Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection (HLATC) has been a destination for those passionate about global textile traditions. And for the past five years, the collection has been the foundation of a curriculum that seeks to help those visitors understand the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation.

The collection is home to more than 13,000 textiles from around the world, ranging from ancient to contemporary materials, and is located within the interdisciplinary Center for Design and Material Culture (CDMC) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. The collection serves a wide range of researchers and community members as well as scores of UW–Madison courses. Classes as diverse as history, financial coaching, interior architecture, and weaving find value in specially curated and facilitated object pulls as well as the changing exhibitions in the Lynn Mecklenburg Textile Gallery.

Many of these students, especially those in art and design-related majors, turn to our collection for “design inspiration.” While students have likely learned how to responsibly quote and cite written materials, they do not necessarily know how to navigate the power dynamics inherent to the study of diverse cultural materials. Indeed, the CDMC staff realized that students lacked a framework for engaging with such materials.

In an effort to support these students and faculty, the CDMC started what has become the “From Cultural Appropriation to Cultural Appreciation” curriculum in the 2018–2019 academic year. Over several years of iteration, pilots, and initial evaluation, hundreds of participants have experienced the curriculum—primarily through invited sessions within university classes and special workshops for community groups and professional colleagues. We continue to hone the curriculum through evaluation and hope

to share a finalized program with diverse community audiences within the next year.

Learning Goals

Our cultural appropriation curriculum offers collection-based case studies in which participants practice engaging with the three key themes: *ownership*, *power*, and *impact*. (See the “Three Key Curriculum Themes” sidebar on p. 50 for definitions of these terms.)

The team leading this project is purposefully diverse, composed of Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators as well as UW faculty, staff, and graduate students. This work has been generously supported by the Equity and Justice Network and the Indigenous EcoWell Initiative, which, like the team, are based in the School of Human Ecology at UW–Madison. The Indigenous EcoWell faculty work focuses on the intersections of Indigenous cultures, health, and language in collaboration with campus partners, WI First Nations, UW–Madison students, and the community.

We offer this curriculum as a teaching resource that we hope other institutions will adapt and use in similar ways with their own collections and audiences. The same issues we encounter when we engage with design students are important for curators, collection managers, designers, and other museum professionals to wrestle with—especially because museums often invite community engagement with the collections they steward. As visitors potentially look to our collection for design inspiration, we want to facilitate meaningful, respectful, and transparent interactions with the objects we care for and the cultures and communities from which they originate.

At the most basic level, cultural appropriation is the act of using or taking a cultural element from one cultural context and (mis)using it in another. But it

can get complicated quickly: borrowing, exchanging, and reworking ideas, technologies, and art forms are central to creative work. So when, how, and why does this borrowing become a problem? In the curriculum, we explore strategies participants can use to identify where appropriation might occur and how to avoid it.

The brightly colored pair of HLATC objects at left has been a powerful way to invite participants into this work. One is a mola (blouse) made around 1930 and worn by Guna women of Guna Yala, Panama. The other is printed, quilting fabric yardage manufactured in 1977 by Pago, Inc., a New York company. The curriculum invites participants to look and wonder: What is similar about these two objects? What is different? What questions arise as you are looking at them or touching them? What other information would you like to know? Did seeing these two objects together impact how you viewed them? Why or why not? Grounded in participants’ material observations of and questions about this object pairing, we can talk about what cultural appropriation can mean.

After time for structured close looking, comparison, and discussion, we offer more context on our object pairing. The ability to make an outstanding mola is a source of pride and income among Guna women. Panama even protected this design in the country through a law passed in 2000 called “Special System for the Collective Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” However, as molas have become more popular with tourists and international art collectors, the market has been flooded with imitation mola panels and other knockoff mola designs for home decor fabrics, bags, and towels for sale outside of Panama.

This pairing purposely invites participants to engage both as designers and as potential consumers. We discuss *ownership* of these traditional designs. We

RESOURCES

“Think Before You appropriate,” Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage (IPinCH), 2008–2016 sfu.ca/ipinch/

Stafford Hood, Rodney Hopson, and Henry Frierson (eds.), *Continuing the Journey to Reposition Culture and Cultural Context in Evaluation Theory and Practice*, 2014

Susan Scafidi, *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law*, 2005

James O. Young and Conrad G. Brunk (eds.), *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, 2012

THREE KEY CURRICULUM THEMES

Ownership: A design or object may be the property of an individual or cultural group.

Power: Cultural appropriation almost always happens in situations where there is a power imbalance between stakeholders.

Impact vs. Intent: Good intentions do not preclude harm. Cultural appropriation usually occurs unintentionally, but it can still be harmful, especially if amplified by issues of ownership and power.

reflect on the *power* imbalances between Guna women and those who might buy or produce these designs abroad. Finally, we consider the *impact* of creating and selling this printed fabric.

Since our collection objects cannot leave our storage without loan paperwork, we have created a traveling collection of mola and imitation-mola quilting fabric so that off-site groups can participate in the hands-on, material lessons of this work. We hope other institutions will use this object pairing as an example they can adapt based on their own collections and audiences.

Once participants have more confidence with key terms and questions, we add more nuanced pairings. A range of “paisleys” from global contexts and knitting patterns along with the historic objects that inspired them or a kimono alongside a 1920s dress encourage conversation and meaningful engagement with our key concepts. Our goal is not to teach a single, static definition of cultural appropriation, but to equip participants with terms and questions about what it means to appropriate as opposed to appreciate diverse cultural designs.

We also make clear that sometimes the answer is not to borrow at all. How might we make space for and support artists and designers to create new works based on their own cultural heritage? We encourage our participants to learn from artists whose work is not only relevant to the topic of cultural appreciation but also centers the voices of Indigenous people and histories.

For example, our collaborator and photographer Dakota Mace (Diné) is one of many Indigenous artists creating transformative art grounded in cultural heritage. Her project “S’ Baa Hane’ (Story of the Stars)”

focuses on sharing her family and culture’s oral traditions through photography and design. By focusing on first-person interpretation and the work of specific artists, we offer concrete ways to appreciate and center the voices of Indigenous makers.

We also discuss collaboration and what mutually beneficial collaboration looks like and makes possible. These conversations aim to empower participants to discuss potentially uncomfortable concepts so that they can engage with diverse cultural materials more thoughtfully.

Evaluating the Results

In evaluating these workshops, we centered the work of Indigenous artists, scholars, professionals, and community members to better understand past and current contexts that shape our curriculum development. Professor Carolee Dodge Francis (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin), an Indigenous professor, scholar, and evaluator, and Joseph Jean, M.P.H., also an Indigenous scholar (Diné) and Ph.D. student, have been instrumental in advising the team and implementing evaluation tools. An Indigenous evaluation framework for the pilot curriculum highlights “being a people of a place, recognizing gifts, honoring family and community, and respecting sovereignty,” as defined in the 2014 book *Continuing the Journey to Reposition Culture and Cultural Context in Evaluation Theory and Practice*.

Thus far, they have created a pre- and post-workshop, five-question, web-based survey instrument to provide initial pilot data. UW–Madison students, community members, and participants from a regional conference have taken the evaluation, and the data shows some promising results. The number of respondents who knew the general definition of cultural

appreciation increased by 25 percent post-workshop, and there was a 22 percent increase in the number of respondents who could identify the critical concepts that distinguish cultural appropriation from cultural appreciation, potentially demonstrating a deeper understanding of the topic.

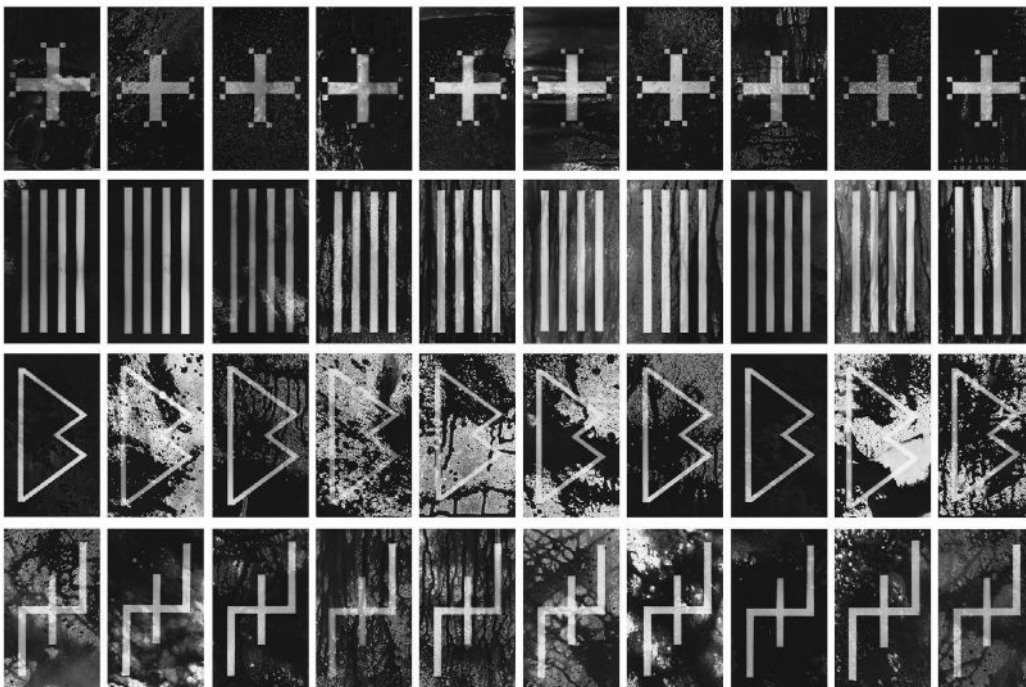
The evaluation and results have sparked productive dialogue among the coauthors developing curriculum modules and among their Indigenous and non-Indigenous community partners. We plan to develop a mixed-methods evaluation tool that will offer further insights about curriculum participants' knowledge patterns. The goal is to provide an evaluation toolkit, along with the broader curriculum, that is scalable and adaptable for other institutions.

This country has a long and painful history of erasure and cultural appropriation with respect to Indigenous people. Unfortunately, in late 2022 a community member with whom the Center for Design and Material Culture had partnered was alleged to have misrepresented their identity and engaged in a range of disingenuous actions, all of which is antithetical to our curriculum. Experiences

like this are still too common, and institutions need to talk openly and humbly about cultural appropriation.

Working together, we can engage in responsible collaboration, research, and cultural appreciation. We hope to empower designers, design students, museum visitors, museum staff, and community members with the tools they need to make sense of this complex issue.

Sarah Anne Carter is an Associate Professor of Design Studies and the Executive Director of the Center for Design and Material Culture. **Carolee Dodge Francis** (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin) is Ecology of Human Well-Being Professor and Chair of Civil Society and Community Studies. **Carolyn Jenkinson** is the Collection Manager of the Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. **Joseph Jean** (Diné) is a Ph.D. student in Civil Society and Community Studies and a Project Assistant focused on evaluation. **Dakota Mace** (Diné) is a Photographer and Researcher in the Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection. For more information visit cdmc.wisc.edu.



Dakota Mace's *Náhookqs Bikq'!* 2022, a chemigram with glass beads and abalone shell, is part of her "Sq' Baa Hane" project in which she shares her family and culture's oral traditions through photography and design.



A young Fort Collins community member engages with the "Mental Health: Mind Matters" exhibition at the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery in 2020.



Let's Talk About It

Working with community partners, Fort Collins Museum of Discovery has started a mental health conversation that has led to ongoing programming.

By Brent Carmack, Shannon Quist, and Laura Vilaret-Tuma

How are you feeling today?

No, really . . . let's do a "stoplight check-in." Green if you're feeling great and ready to roll; yellow if you aren't quite sure, a little tentative; red if you are struggling. Of course, you can pass if you don't want to share.

At Fort Collins Museum of Discovery (FCMoD), an all-ages local history, science, and culture museum in Northern Colorado, we start many meetings with a quick stoplight check-in. It offers a moment to self-reflect, acknowledge each other's feelings, build empathy, and honor our boundaries. This is just one of the many ways FCMoD continues to make mental health a priority in all we do.

In 2019, the mental health statistics in Northern Colorado's Larimer County were alarming: 41,000 of the county's 360,000 plus residents were diagnosed with a mental illness, and 40 percent of local school children reported feeling hopelessness more than once in the previous two weeks. The pandemic only compounded the crisis facing our community. Between 2017 and 2021, 393 families in the county lost a loved one to suicide.

As a place of gathering and belonging, a trusted source of information, and a part of the larger community ecosystem, we wanted to help—but *how*? Like most of us in the museum field, we weren't trained to

provide direct mental health services, and, like most of our society, we didn't feel equipped to have a conversation about mental health among ourselves, much less with others.

So how did FCMoD become an active participant in the community-wide effort to address the mental health crisis in our region? In short, we said, "We have to." We decided to activate our strengths, align with experts in our community to create meaningful opportunities, and expand the conversation around mental health.

From Cooperation to Collaboration

In January 2019, we began the work of building partnerships with the mental health community by inviting Laurie Stolen, the Director of Larimer County Behavioral Health Services, to travel with us to St. Paul, Minnesota, to see the "Mental Health: Mind Matters" exhibition. The exhibition was created by the Science Museum of Minnesota and Heureka Finnish Science Centre, and advised by the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Presented in English, Spanish, and French, it explores how to destigmatize conversations around mental health, frame mental health as part of our overall health, build language and empathy about mental illnesses, identify and express emotions that increase our understanding

of ourselves and others, and share the importance of reaching out for help.

After seeing the exhibition, Stolen supported bringing it to FCMoD. “It’s essential to engage all community members in ways they can support their family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues who are navigating mental health challenges,” she said at the time. “In this upcoming work, building empathy and understanding is of utmost importance. Fort Collins Museum of Discovery is providing a crucial resource to do so with this exhibit.”

Stolen was also a conduit to an extensive network of mental health professionals working to build empathy for and understanding about mental health challenges in Northern Colorado. Working together, we began to shape the partnership model that would align with the exhibition’s run and continue after it. We modeled this partnership work on the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Results Count foundational framework, the Theory of Aligned Contributions, which contends that measurable population-level change occurs when the right group of leaders uses specific skills to align their actions and make contributions to a specific result.

In the end, more than 25 partners from all sectors of the community—health care, philanthropy, education, government, nonprofit, business, and media—began working together. The group included partners we already had relationships with and new ones recommended by our mental health community. We met regularly to learn about each organization’s ongoing work, offer the museum as a platform, explore how we could create experiences related to the exhibition with our community, and generally get to know each other.

To build trust and demonstrate possibilities, we consistently started from a place of “yes.” We did not ask our partners what they could do for the museum, but instead what FCMoD could do to help support their work. For many partners, this was their first time interacting with the museum. We tried to make collaboration easy, creating lower-stakes points of entry. Did they want to share their resources at a table in the museum lobby? Were they interested in coming to the museum and sharing resources directly with visitors? Were there other ways we could partner and support each other?

We were focused on responding to community need, and we happily ceded authority to the experts

HOW TO START THE MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATION AT YOUR MUSEUM

- Lean into your strengths. Consider what you are already doing to support your community and provide spaces of belonging.
- Start with a familiar format—like an exhibition or a public program—to bring awareness and information about mental health to your visitors.
- Talk with mental health professionals in your area: collaborate with them on content, be open to their suggestions, and be a platform for their expertise.
- Support staff by equipping them with the tools necessary to talk about well-being, such as professional development and mental health trainings.
- Share physical and digital resources from trusted mental health organizations with your community.
- Get feedback from your community about how your museum can be a mental health respite, and meaningfully involve them in the planning.
- Be consistent. Mental health is more relevant than ever, so keep the conversation going, no matter how big or small.

in the room. If a good idea surfaced, we committed the resources necessary to see it to fruition, whether at the museum or an off-site location. And we were not afraid to push our comfort zone. These conversations led to many connections, not just for FCMoD but among the partner organizations.

Soon we were planning a long list of programs and activities to complement the exhibition, many of which continue today.

- Host Alliance for Suicide Prevention/Imagine Zero Coalition's annual Teen Self-Care Fair, where more than 300 local teens explored 37 booths and sessions that provide resources in a fun atmosphere.
- Facilitate a suite of multimedia activities at off-site community engagement events to introduce basic mental health concepts, such as emotional awareness, coping techniques, and effective communication.
- Partner with Colorado State University's ACT Film Festival to host three screenings of the film *Dope Is Death* with panel discussions after each screening designed for specific audiences, including an exclusive screening for folks in recovery.
- Provide resources and support in the exhibition space through counselors associated with SummitStone Health Partners.
- Offer free gun safety locks to visitors as part of Larimer County's "It Only Takes a Moment" campaign to end teen suicide.

Redefining Our Role

Our collective work did not go unnoticed. Recognizing the importance of human connectivity and access to resources, the city of Fort Collins provided funding to make the entire museum free to all visitors during the first run of the exhibition from September 2020–January 2021. In addition, the Science Museum of Minnesota saw our partnership's good work and helped arrange a second engagement of the exhibition "Mind Matters" at FCMoD from September 2021–January 2022.

For FCMoD, this work created a new sense of our mission and what being a museum means, and it led to new opportunities we never imagined. It

also reminded us that a sense of belonging *is* mental health. Fostering belonging through culturally responsive and community-based experiences, as we do with our annual Día de Muertos altar display and celebration, is deeply powerful. Each year the museum turns over a significant portion of our main gallery to dozens of families who share altars created to commemorate loved ones. For many, this observance brings forth complex emotions of grief, joy, and healing. Doing this year after year builds trust between our museum and those who observe this tradition.

As a proven partner, FCMoD is now consistently at the table for conversations about the community's mental health needs, including serving as a member of the steering committee to address youth mental health. In January, the museum hosted over 150 community leaders and organizations at a two-day youth mental health summit led by the Poudre School District. Numerous times during the summit FCMoD was recognized as an example of a trusted organization, one that does the work and will continue to have impact.

For FCMoD, the commitment continues.

Brent Carmack is Associate Director, **Shannon Quist** is Director for Community Connections, and **Laura Vilaret-Tuma** is Community Engagement Manager at Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, an AAM-accredited museum that has welcomed more than 1 million visitors since opening its doors in 2012. Reach Brent at bcarmack@fcmo.org.



"Mental Health: Mind Matters" traveling exhibition
new.smm.org/exhibit-rental/mind-matters

Annie E. Casey Foundation, Results Count and the Theory of Aligned Contributions
bit.ly/3IkCAk7

New technologies
will continue to push
the boundaries of
how we traditionally
have engaged with
art.



What Makes a Member?

Museums need to take
a hybrid approach to the
visitor journey.

By Dan Sullivan



Tell me if you've heard this one

before: a first-time visitor, a return attendee, and a member walk into your museum. Which one holds the most value to your organization?

As you might have guessed, it's a trick question. While membership professionals know that members hold significantly more immediate and lifetime value than visitors (4.5 times more value, according to market research from Colleen Dilenschneider), less attention is paid to the *potential* value of a visitor. This is somewhat understandable, as it's well-established that it generally takes more time and effort to convert a visitor into a new member than to get an existing member to renew.

Does that mean you're leaving significant potential value on the table? What does it take to unlock the potential value of a visitor?

We live in a different world than we did before the pandemic, visible both in shifting audience priorities and habits and in the digital transformation of museum approaches to audience engagement, visitor services, programming, operations, and more. During the initial lockdowns, museums were forced to act swiftly to capture audiences in our abruptly virtual world.

As the world reopened and visitors returned on-site, audience needs once again evolved—yet the desire for virtual content has not gone back to its pre-pandemic levels. Since reopening, online visits have remained the same or increased for half of the arts organizations surveyed in a recent study by the Network of European Museum Organisations. And a report from Culture Track on the effects of the pandemic within arts and culture organizations found that a small but steadfast segment of the public (9 percent) prefer to engage exclusively with virtual programming.

The pandemic accelerated us into a digital-first world, and the “new normal” increasingly looks like a hybrid one that includes both in-person experiences and a consistent demand for digital content and virtual interaction.

In 2022, in an effort to explore what “hybrid” means for audiences and museums, the Cuseum team launched the first comprehensive study on hybrid approaches to audience activation, the visitor journey, and programming. Five hundred museum professionals from art museums and galleries; children's museums; history museums and landmarks; gardens, arboretums, parks, and nature centers; science centers and natural history museums; and zoos and aquariums participated in the survey. Their responses answer questions that include:

- How many museums have launched hybrid programming, and what hybrid offerings are most popular?
- How can digital experiences and touchpoints enhance the visitor experience before, during, and after guests come on-site?
- What digital tools and technologies can help cultural organizations thrive in a hybrid environment?

The Transformed Visitor Journey

The hybrid report offers deeper insight into the ways in which digital has transformed the member journey and audience priorities and needs along the way, conceptualized in three phases: pre-visit, visit, and post-visit. Each stage of this journey can be bolstered through digital exchanges, content, and technology.

RESOURCES

The State of Virtual & Hybrid Programs at Cultural Organizations: Volume 1—The Future of the Visitor Experience

membership.cuseum.com/2022-hybrid-report-vol-1

The State of Virtual & Hybrid Programs at Cultural Organizations: Volume 2—Virtual and Hybrid Programs

membership.cuseum.com/2022-hybrid-report-vol-2

Report: The Impact of Virtual Programs on Revenue Generation for Cultural Organizations

cuseum.com/revenue-generation-report-2021

IMPACTS Experience & The National Awareness, Attitudes, and Usage Study (NAAU)

impacts-experience.com/naau-study/

Culture Track: Culture + Community in a Time of Transformation (Wave 2)

culturetrack.com/research/transformation/

“Strategically placed QR codes or social media prompts can deliver an on-site interactive experience that spreads enthusiasm through online networks.”

Most museums are already doing this: of the 500 cultural professionals surveyed, 70 percent said their institution uses digital or virtual channels to engage in-person visitors before and/or after they visit on-site. On-site offerings can be a catalyst for online engagement, creating an interactive feedback loop that encourages maximum audience participation.

Following are some ideas on how to design the most effective visitor experience from the pre-visit through the post-visit that can help pave the path from visitor to member.

■ The Pre-Visit

To foster meaningful engagement with your online content and platforms, create a variety of pathways for visitors to explore based on their interests. The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation and the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago (MSI), websites provide visitors with custom itineraries based on their preferences. Visitors can develop “My Must-See Guide” at The Henry Ford website or answer a few questions on the MSI website to get a custom agenda for an in-person visit.

Timed ticketing can ease the visitation experience for both visitors and museums, so it’s no surprise that 67 percent of surveyed institutions provide advanced timed ticketing. Timed ticketing, which rose in response to social distancing concerns during the pandemic, is still popular not only as a public health measure but as a way to gather insight into audience habits and needs. With online ticketing and timed ticketing software, data such as audience demographics, attendance trends, and purchasing patterns can be collected and used with customer relationship management (CRM) and point-of-sale (POS) systems to employ dynamic pricing, member-only hours, group reservations, and other ticket bundling offers.

■ The Visit

While museums are now more likely to offer online experiences, many have been slow to explore technological solutions for their in-person visitors. Only 31 percent of the 500 museum professionals surveyed agreed that they are using such technologies and digital experiences to engage with people visiting them physically. In other words, there’s plenty of room for growth here.

Entry and on-site commerce offer opportunities for engagement as well as revenue. The Georgia Aquarium has partnered with Tessitura to install self-service ticketing kiosks that allow visitors to explore special animal encounters or other offerings at their own convenience. Its popular dolphin show, for instance, is included in the general admission but requires reservations, and for \$5, visitors can reserve VIP seats. At special donation kiosks at the National Museums Scotland and People’s History Museum in London, visitors can simply tap their payment device to make a donation.

Strategically placed QR codes or social media prompts can deliver an on-site interactive experience that spreads enthusiasm through online networks. The Philadelphia Museum of Art encourages users to take a selfie at the Great Stair Hall and tag them @philamuseum across Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

■ The Post-Visit

After an on-site visit, museums can continue the engagement by offering online activities related to the on-site experiences. At the new immersive learning center at The Met in New York City, children have access to on-site physical activities along with virtual connections to artwork from its galleries. After their visit, they can continue to explore The Met’s offerings through #MetKids, an online portal that provides

engaging and kid-friendly behind-the-scenes videos, gamified interactive museum maps, a “time machine” through 500 years of art history, as well as ideas for home-based arts and crafts projects.

Museums are also using visitor data to offer follow-up activities and targeted offers. For example, at Denver Art Museum, previous visitors are often invited back via promotional campaigns focused on larger exhibitions that require tickets, turning each visit into a powerful opportunity to convert visitors into members.

From the visitors’ standpoint, increased data collection means they expect digital services to be personalized. According to data from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, personalization not only improves member satisfaction and loyalty, but also helps organizations better understand their constituents’ needs. Anthony Rivera, then VP of Operations and Hospitality at Georgia Aquarium, noted in an interview with Tessitura that 30–40 percent of walk-up guests prefer the automated ticketing kiosks to traditional retail windows. At self-serve kiosks, says Rivera, special offers “feel more like opportunities than upsells,” which has translated to a higher per-capita spend.

The Path Forward

Given that museums are now operating in a hybrid environment, seeking to engage visitors before, during, and after visits with online and digital offerings, what should they focus on to meet audience demands, grow membership, and unlock new revenue streams? Following are some thoughts.

■ Listen and Communicate to Build Trust

We know that the public has a high level of trust in museums, but it’s worth remembering how essential that trust is in fostering member retention. A 2017 study from Culture Track found that trustworthiness topped members’ list of top loyalty motivators, with 61 percent of respondents saying their commitment to a cultural organization is most informed by how much trust they place in the organization.

Listening to and communicating with your members reaffirms this trust. Comment boxes, web pages, and surveys are important ways to actively listen to your constituents—and a critical means of gathering

data. In fact, in Cuseum’s 2022 Membership Insights study, collecting member data via surveys was the top tip membership experts gave for determining which digital initiatives to pursue.

Keeping members informed with news and updates sustains engagement and keeps your museum front of mind. For example, research from IMPACTS Experience shows that regularly informing members about their access and benefits helps reduce member turnover associated with members who simply forget to renew.

■ Collect Data

The private sector has long invested in assessing consumer habits and psychology. By leveraging big data analytics, companies around the globe are gathering valuable insights about customers and partners and using that information to enhance operational efficiency, improve product development, and spark innovative ideas. Such data offers museums invaluable insight into their target audiences’ interests and preferences, allowing them to make informed decisions about programming, promotional initiatives, and outreach.

A good example is demographic data: millennials are now driving up levels of member engagement at many organizations that previously relied on baby boomers for consistent support, according to data from IMPACTS and the National Awareness, Attitudes and Usage Study of Visitor-Serving Organizations. Not only do millennials have a higher lifetime value given their younger age, they have a shorter visitation cycle; they are 30.9 percent more likely to revisit within one year than older generations. In addition, they are 20 percent more likely to recommend an experience to peers. This is invaluable given that word-of-mouth recommendations and other user-generated endorsements are almost 13 times more important in driving reputation and visitation than advertising.

■ Innovate and Diversify

As early as 2007, the Association of Art Museum Directors released a study that, in part, encouraged museums to “develop and manage a highly diversified portfolio of revenue streams to ensure institutional stability.” And according to the 2022 Commerce Innovation Report, constituent loyalty drops when

brands don't innovate. The report found that more than half of consumers display a strong desire for brands that adapt to meet evolving customer preferences, payment options, and digital devices.

What's the upshot? Even with attractive incentives and an engaging user experience, offering new and diverse channels for engagement is essential for maintaining an active and loyal member base. In addition to virtual programming and digital communication, this also includes on-site opportunities for engagement that include immersive sensory experiences, gamified interactive exhibits, live social and cultural events, and even digital surveys or other audience feedback mechanisms that collect and leverage visitor data. According to Sigma Data Insights, member renewal rates are not only positively correlated with the number of times a member visits, but also with their level of engagement on-site.

The arts and culture sector has faced a multitude of challenges over the past few years, but by diversifying outreach and communication channels and investing in enhanced digital programming and innovation, museums can drive growth, engagement, and retention. With the right member insights, museums and cultural organizations can deepen constituent relationships, turn visitors into lifelong members and advocates, and continue to provide cultural value to new and returning audiences for years to come.

Dan Sullivan is Head of Growth & Partnerships at Cuseum, a technology partner helping museums, attractions, and nonprofits drive visitor, member, and donor engagement. Reach him at dan@cuseum.com or visit cuseum.com.

Technology is providing new methods of interaction, expanding the possibilities of language, accessibility, and interpretation.





Revisiting **MUSEUMS ADVOCACY DAY 2023**

On February 27–28, **250 museum advocates** gathered in Washington, D.C., participating in a robust day of programming before making our voices heard on Capitol Hill in over **300 Congressional visits!**



The energy was palpable as museum advocates returned in-person to Washington, D.C. this year! We heard from a congressional chief of staff, federal agency leaders, and partner policy experts about the unique value of museums and the importance of advocating for museums and the federal programs that support them. In Congressional visits, we shared critical information on key legislative priorities to support museums, and advocates shared countless examples of essential and vibrant museums serving their communities.

THANK YOU to all of our 2023 supporters, partners, and advocates who helped make Museums Advocacy Day 2023 an impactful event, and for continuing to advocate for museums in the year ahead.

1



2



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To read more about Museums Advocacy Day 2023 in our press release and explore our recap photo album, including Congressional visits on Capitol Hill, visit:

» aam-us.org/museums-advocacy-day

CONGRATULATIONS!

We were pleased to award four dedicated museum advocates with **Advocacy Leadership Awards**. Pictured (left to right) in the first photo: **Jason B. Jones** (Western Museums Association), **Bonnie Styles** (Association of Science Museum Directors), **Laura Lott** (American Alliance of Museums) with the awardees, and **Charity M. Counts** (Association of Midwest Museums); and in the second photo **Dr. Vedet Coleman-Robinson** (Association of African American Museums) and **Laura Lott** (AAM).



Advocates heard federal agency overviews from (pictured left to right): **Crosby Kemper** (Institute of Museum and Library Services), **Dr. Sylvia Butterfield** (National Science Foundation), **Ayanna Hudson** (National Endowment for the Arts), **Megan Brown** (National Park Service), and **Shelly C. Lowe** (National Endowment for the Humanities).



[1] Advocates speak to Rep. John Larson's staff. [2] Advocates speak with Sen. Markwayne Mullin. [3] Kimberly Rudolph, Chief of Staff, Rep. André D. Carson, speaks to museum advocates. [4] Museums advocates prepare and gather in the halls before meeting with congressional offices. [5] Advocates point to a factsheet from "Museums as Economic Engines" in a congressional visit. [6] Advocates enjoy a reception at the Capitol Visitors Center. [7] Museums Advocacy Day returned in person with 250 advocates in attendance. [8] A special thanks to Corporate Sponsor **Blackbaud** for their steadfast support of Museums Advocacy Day! [9] Thank you to our Co-Convenor and Leader supporter organizations for your support.



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A heartfelt **THANK YOU** to all the supporters who make Museums Advocacy Day possible!

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THOMAS D. MANGELSEN
A LIFE IN THE WILD



This exhibition showcases 40 legacy photographs of landscapes and wildlife from all seven continents selected exclusively by Thomas D. Mangelsen. Every image was taken in the wild under natural conditions; the result of waiting for the “picture perfect moment”, across decades and often in hostile settings. Such a body of work can only be achieved by patience, a heightened sense of animal behavior, and the uncanny ability to read changing atmospheric conditions. At a time when digital technology is reprogramming its users to have shorter attention spans, *A Life in the Wild* stands as a testament to the rewards that can come from a lifetime of waiting for nature’s revelations.

THOMAS D. MANGELSEN | A LIFE IN THE WILD is now being extended into 2024 and beyond after a highly successful tour to twenty museums in the U.S. and Canada over the past four years. 🌐 Mangelsen.com/exhibitions

To book the exhibition, contact: David J. Wagner, Ph.D., Tour Director
☎ (414) 221-6878 @ davidjwagnerllc@yahoo.com 🌐 davidjwagnerllc.com
Member American Alliance of Museums and International Council of Museums

“What Tom has accomplished would be extremely difficult to duplicate. His photographs inspire me because they wake us up to what is at stake. When I think of the very talented nature photographers I’ve been fortunate to know—counted among the very best who ever lived—I consider Tom Mangelsen to be an American treasure.”

~ Jane Goodall

