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Finding the Public: Models of Interaction Between Curatorial and Education Departments in Three American Encyclopedic Museums

Liam Sweeney

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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FINDING THE PUBLIC: MODELS OF INTERACTION BETWEEN CURATORIAL AND
EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS IN THREE AMERICAN ENCYCLOPEDIA MUSEUMS

by

LIAM SWEENEY

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies
program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City
University of New York

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Finding The Public: Models of Interaction Between Curatorial and Education Departments in
Three American Encyclopedic Museums

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Liam Sweeney

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies program in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date: 1/14/2019

Susan A. Dumais
Thesis Advisor

Date

Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis
Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

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By

Liam Sweeney

Adviser: Prof. Susan A. Dumais

Curatorial and education departments have coexisted for the last half century in American art museums, and have often had differing attitudes about who the museum is for and how best to convey the current and historical meaning of the works they display. This results from trends and transformations in the field, which have recently yielded an increased attention on broadening the definition of the public that the museum serves. This thesis examines interactions between curatorial and education departments in three encyclopedic art museums across the United States, in order to better understand how meaningful collaboration can be fostered between these cultural representatives, in order to most effectively build relationships with the museum's constituents.

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My parents, David and Fiona Sweeney, have been incredibly supportive and provided me with such valuable tools to pursue my creative and intellectual interests. My siblings, Deirdre, Mary, Ashlinn and Peter, are essential to everything I do.

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I. Introduction

American cultural institutions have the privilege and responsibility of presenting the breadth of cultural narratives that historically and currently compose the heritage of their local, national, and as the case may be international constituents. It is an impressive institutional landscape by many metrics; the United States have the highest number, a quarter, of the top 100 largest museums in the world, as measured by gallery space.¹ This is triple the number of the next three countries, Italy, France and China, which each have eight of the top 100. American museums also outpace international peers in terms of attendance; thirteen of the top eighty museums with respect to attendance are in the U.S., totaling over 30 million visitors per year.² *Museums as Economic Engines*, a study conducted by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and Oxford Economics, with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, found that museums generate roughly 726,000 jobs in the United States, and directly employ 372,100 people.³ Another recent study shows that museums contribute approximately \$50 billion to the US economy each year, and that \$12 billion per year is generated in tax revenue to federal, state, and local governments.⁴

However, all too often cultural representation in the U.S. art museum is limited to that of structurally dominant groups, who gain access through capital resources and networks of

¹ Amber Pariona, "The Largest Art Museums In The World," World Atlas, May 17, 2017, accessed January 05, 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-largest-art-museums-in-the-world.html>; "List of Largest Art Museums." Wikipedia. January 01, 2019. Accessed January 05, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_art_museums.

² The Art Newspaper, "Art's Most Popular: Exhibition and Museum Visitor Figures 2017," How to Read a Twombly | The Art Newspaper, August 09, 2018, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://theartnewspaper.com/news/art-s-most-popular-exhibition-and-museum-figures-2017>; Rubin, Judith, ed. *TEA/AECOM 2017 Theme Index and Museum Index: The Global Attractions Attendance Report*. 2018.

³ more than double that of the professional sports industry, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics; not strictly limited to art museums

⁴ Robert Stein, "Museums as Economic Engines," American Alliance of Museums, July 25, 2018, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://www.aam-us.org/2018/01/19/museums-as-economic-engines/>.

privilege.⁵ Furthermore, the cyclical nature of canonization and art history education has traditionally reinforced a tacit social hierarchy—that art is defined as those objects and people who occupy our galleries and theaters.⁶ But communities and artists are constantly defining and claiming their culture, outside of institutional contexts and frameworks. This raises a question: Who is the art museum for?

Arts administrators and community advocates have been negotiating this question in their daily work, as well as in academic and other formalized institutional outlets. From one perspective, museums have a long way to go before realizing their potential as robust civic spaces. In *Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse*, author Robert Janes, editor-in-chief of the journal *Museum Management and Curatorship*, suggests that museums rarely engage with their communities on global or local issues likely to affect their lives;⁷ an observation that is echoed by Dr. Lynn Dierking in her article “Being of Value: Intentionally Fostering and Documenting Public Value”: “During the recent Great Recession, I observed that many institutions drew inward trying to figure out how they could survive with very few asking how the museum and its resources could support their communities through these difficult times.” Observing that museums have become increasingly implicated in the values of global markets over engagement in local communities, she says, “Looking in from the outside, it is as though museums have forgotten, at best, or at worst, neglected, their important role as social institutions and community stewards.”⁸ These observations compare the current

⁵ Peggy Levitt, "Museums Must Attract Diverse Visitors or Risk Irrelevance," *The Atlantic*, November 09, 2015, accessed December 09, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/museums-must-attract-diverse-visitors-or-risk-irrelevance/433347/>; "I Would Have Thought the Needle Would Have Moved More" – Art Agency, Partners," September 20th, 2018, accessed December 09, 2018, <http://www.artagencypartners.com/data-story/>.

⁶ La Placa Cohen, “Culture Track ‘17”, February 2017, <https://s28475.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CT2017-Top-Line-Report.pdf>

⁷ Robert R. Janes, *Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse?* (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁸ Lynn D. Dierking, "Being of Value," *Journal of Museum Education* 35, no. 1 (2010): , doi:10.1080/10598650.2010.11510646.

state of the field to a more fruitful past. What is the nature of that shift? Who is the museum for these days, and how does that compare to the past? Two key players in this struggle between serving the public and serving the elite are museums' education and curatorial departments, which have historically had different objectives. The conflict has not been well documented, but is well known by administrators in the field.

To investigate these questions, I draw on findings from three case studies conducted with three encyclopedic museums, Brooklyn Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Detroit Institute of Arts, which explored the dynamics between curatorial and education departments using qualitative methods. By looking specifically at encyclopedic museums, museums which present art from ancient times to present day, we are able to study three museums that operate in very different environments, but with the same mandate to serve the public with the broadest possible spectrum of history and culture. The three case studies demonstrate the ways in which these departments can achieve gains with the public by working collaboratively, but also reveals barriers to succeeding in this effort, which can sometimes be influenced by issues of structural disenfranchisement and demographic representation.

Historical Context

Dierking's observation seems to suggest that there has been a shift in priorities away from serving the public and toward self-preservation in the context of the 2010 recession. However, it is unclear when exactly it was that museums so effectively fulfilled community needs. When museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Art Institute of Chicago were established in the 19th century, there was, as Vera Zolberg describes, a

pre-professional aristocratic thrust to the project.⁹ Often, trustees served as curators for these spaces, or if the board were to hire a curator, their role would be largely diplomatic, managing the interests and desires of the trustees. The social element of the museum was significant, in the sense that it provided access to an elite social class and served as a leisure space. If the public was considered, it was not in the spirit of co-created meaning and learning, but rather as a mode of philanthropy meant to bring the sophisticated realm of fine art to the uneducated masses.

As the discipline of Art History took root in America toward the end of the 19th century, curators began to professionalize, bringing scholarly expertise to their role in the museum. With this development, a level of labor organizing took place among curators in museums, which ultimately created a stronger distinction between staff and board, and granted a high degree of institutional power to curatorial departments.¹⁰ This shift was also informed by changes in the academy during the 20th century. At their inception, museums were viewed by scholars as a resource of knowledge production, purely by virtue of the fact that they housed objects, and physical objects were then still central to knowledge production.¹¹ This changed in the twentieth century in a number of disciplines, and the humanities were no exception, as knowledge production increasingly shifted towards the university and filtered into museum practice and presentation, particularly with the advent of modernism and the development of critical theory.

By the 1960s, museum education was an established field, with a mandate of training the public in the increasingly complex art history concepts that were developing among curators and academics. The profession was dismissed by many as “women’s work,” who saw the role of

⁹ Vera L. Zolberg, "American Art Museums: Sanctuary or Free-For-All?" *Social Forces* 63, no. 2 (1984): 377-92. doi:10.2307/2579052.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Vera L. Zolberg, "Conflicting Visions in American Art Museums," *Theory and Society* 10, no. 1 (1981): 103-25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656981>.

museum educator as more closely related to childcare than interpretation and pedagogy. Trends in the academy transformed museum education over the 1980s and 1990s. Melinda M. Mayer has expanded this view in her article “Postmodern Puzzle: Rewriting the Place of the Visitor in Art Museum Education,” providing evidence that the field was influenced by academic disciplines such as multicultural feminist theory, ecological and critical theory, cultural sociology,¹² and semiotics.¹³ By the mid ‘90s credentialing degrees in art education, museum education, museum studies and studio art, as well as art history were often necessary requisites for museum education roles. But much of the early efforts in museum education were geared towards delivering factual information and academic concepts to the visitor. What Mayer points out, which has deeply informed our current dynamics, is that postmodern developments in the academy shifted the authority of interpretation from the maker to the reader, “The semiotic theory of intertextuality changed where the center of interpretation resided. Poststructuralist semiotics moved the center of the act of reading from the text to the reader. Interpreting texts became less a modernist project of determining authorial intent and more an interaction of reader, text, and their many contexts in a construction of meaning. As French semiotician Roland Barthes stated, “And no doubt that is what reading is: rewriting the text of the work within the text of our lives,”¹⁴ contrasting the practice of meaning-making to the modernist tradition of interpreting authorial intent. Here we see a shift in authority in relation to interpreting art. The individual’s lived experience becomes an integral part of the interpretive process. As such, professionals who can interface with and understand the varied lived experiences of the lay

¹² C. B. Stapp, (1992). “Defining museum education. In *Patterns in practice*” (pp. 112-117). Washington, DC: Museum Education Roundtable. (Reprinted from *Roundtable Reports*, 1984, 5*1), 3-4.)

¹³ Melinda M. Mayer, "A Postmodern Puzzle: Rewriting the Place of the Visitor in Art Museum Education." *Studies in Art Education* 46, no. 4 (2005): 356-68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25475762>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

public will have a greater ability to foster an interpretation that leads to a meaningful experience with art.

In spite of this development, Mayer says, “The power relations in art museums privileged art historical interpretations made by the curatorial staff as appropriate content for dissemination to art museum visitors [...] The context of the visitor’s life entered the process not as generative in meaning making, but as posteriorly connected to interpretation. it was a *reading* process.”¹⁵

A playground for aristocrats, a source of scholarly knowledge production, a venue for manifesting conceptual innovations, a site for preservation and collection of art objects. In each case, the public has had to negotiate its position relative to the institution, and its relationship to the notion of visual art that the museum proposed.

Museums and Civic Engagement

Mayer’s observations and, broadly speaking, the dynamics between curatorial and education departments in art museums speaks to a tension that the museum field has faced as it has matured over the last 150 years: between that of being a collections focused institution, focused primarily on collecting, curating, researching and stewarding art objects, versus a visitor centered institution which fosters community building and civic engagement. As we will see, both of these functions can coexist harmoniously, but when mismanaged they can work against one another, as varying factions in the museum seek to present works in accordance with their disciplines. In both cases, representation becomes an important consideration. In the case of a collections-oriented approach, attention must be paid to the cultural representation of objects

¹⁵ Ibid.

within a museum's collection. In the case of the visitor centered approach, attention must be paid to the demographics of the visitors of the museum. In both cases, staff diversity is essential.

The conceptual art movement of Institutional Critique, pioneered by artists such as Fred Wilson and Adrian Piper among many others in the second half of the twentieth century, has turned a critical eye toward the cultural narratives museums choose to present. This movement has emerged amid a discourse among museum administrators as to whether the museum is primarily collections oriented, versus being a “third place” for the public to gather, learn and engage with art in a social context.¹⁶ The need for such spaces is well documented. The scholarship of Robert Putnam,¹⁷ William Galston,¹⁸ Steven Rosenstone and Mark Hanson,¹⁹ and Elizabeth Thesis Morse and John Hibbing,²⁰ among others, have revealed a troubling decline in civic engagement in the latter half of the 20th century, and continuing today. Much of this research focuses on the steep decline of fraternal organizations and societies, like the Elks Club and the Knights of Columbus—historic drivers of civic engagement. Recently, in an attempt to understand the shifting roles grass roots organizations are playing in relation to the public, studies have shown that local non-profit organizations have increasingly filled that role, fostering civic engagement.²¹ Underscoring the potential role museums can play as centers for civic

¹⁶ Ramon Oldenburg, and Dennis Brissett, "The third place," *Qualitative sociology* 5, no. 4 (1982): 265-284.

¹⁷ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2007)

¹⁸ William Galston, "Civic Knowledge, Civic Education, and Civic Engagement: A Summary of Recent Research," *International Journal of Public Administration* 30 (2007), pp. 623– 642; and William Galston, "Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001), pp. 217– 234;

¹⁹ Steven Rosenstone and Mark Hanson, *Mobilization and Participation in American Democracy* (New York: Longman, 2002);

²⁰ Elizabeth Theiss-Morse and John Hibbing. "Citizenship and Civic Engagement," *Annual Review of Political Science* 8 (2005), pp. 227– 249.

²¹ Samantha Majic, "Serving Sex Workers and Promoting Democratic Engagement: Rethinking Nonprofits Role in American Civic and Political Life," *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 04 (2011): , doi:10.1017/s1537592711003951. See also: Samantha Majic, "Participation Despite the Odds: Examining Sex Workers Political Engagement," *New Political Science* 36, no. 1 (2014): , doi:10.1080/07393148.2013.859901.

engagement, the Irvine Foundation’s 2017 report, “Hearts and Minds: The Arts of Civic Engagement,” reveals the ways in which engagement in the arts correlates to civic engagement, regardless of racial or socioeconomic variables.²² And with research from the National Awareness, Attitudes, and Usage Study showing that the public is more likely to trust a museum than a newspaper, art museums find themselves well positioned to execute this mission.²³

Amid these discussions, the question arises, what does it mean for a museum to be civically engaged? Ellen Hirzy works towards a definition in *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums*: "Civic engagement occurs when museum and community intersect- in subtle and overt ways, over time, and as an accepted and natural way of doing business. The museum becomes a center where people gather to meet and converse, a place that celebrates the richness of individual and collective experience, and a participant in collaborative problem solving."²⁴ Making a case for the educators’ role in facilitating this process, Hirzy calls for educators to play a role of “culture broker” in the museum, which she describes in the following passage:

“[...] serving as facilitator and negotiator between the museum and the community with the goal of developing a shared understanding and collaboration. Being a cultural broker involves facilitation of a series of exchanges between different entities as well as the cultivation of those exchanges for deeper dialogues to better understand diverse perspectives and problem solve together. The result is often new opportunities that benefit all involved.”

²² Nick Rabkin, “Hearts and Minds: The Arts and Civic Engagement A report for The James Irvine Foundation,” Irvine Foundation (2017)

²³ “People Trust Museums More Than Newspapers. Here Is Why That Matters Right Now (DATA),” Colleen Dilenschneider, June 28, 2017, accessed September 28, 2017, <https://www.colleendilen.com/2017/04/26/people-trust-museums-more-than-newspapers-here-is-why-that-matters-right-now-data/>.

²⁴ *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2002).

This deliberate approach to including community voices in the museum's activities is one way in which museum educators can further the museum's mission of becoming a more robust visitor centered space.²⁵ At the same time, a discourse has emerged among curators towards the "educational turn" in curatorial practice. One of these discussions resembles a more conceptual approach to how the institution can be radically reimagined, as a jumping off point from some of the institutional critique discourses.²⁶ Borrowing Foucault's use of the Greek "parrhesia," a word that loosely translates to 'free speech,' Irit Rogoff draws on Foucault's nuancing of the term: "The active components of parrhesia, according to Foucault, are frankness ("to say everything"), truth ("to tell the truth because he knows it is true"), danger ("only if there is a risk of danger in his telling the truth"), criticism ("not to demonstrate the truth to someone else, but as the function of criticism") and duty ("telling the truth is regarded as a duty")." Emerging from the 2007 *SUMMIT: Non-Aligned Initiatives in Education Culture*, Rogoff came to view the museum's civic role as related to this blunt discourse.

It is worth noting a distinct shift in cultural discourse, which now inflects Rogoff's vision. Since 2007, there has been an undeniable resurgence of white nationalism, which has made the boundaries between free speech and hate speech a source of vociferous debate among many cultural and academic institutions. Sadly, it is hard to read Rogoff's notes on the educational turn among curators in 2018 without fear that the aspects of frankness, danger, and duty which she presumably imagined would bring forth voices from the left critical of neoliberal

²⁵ While community can refer to multiple constituencies in the museum which may not intersect outside of the institution, such as local residents vs international tourists, the visitor centered orientation often invokes community in relation to a local physical environment, though that is inherently informed by the national and international stage of the institution. As we will see, Detroit Institute of Arts, Brooklyn Museum, and LACMA have all taken marked shifts towards engaging the residents of their respective cities who have historically been excluded from the museum.

²⁶ "Turning," *The Truth of Art - Journal #71* March 2016 - E-flux, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68470/turning/>.

values and complicit inequalities, without wondering if they could lend themselves to iterations of the destructive acts promoted and enacted by white nationalists. Museums, then, have a tenuous hold on a coveted and intangible asset. They steward art objects of great monetary value and cultural significance. They act as a third place for the public to gather and interact. They maintain a high degree of public trust, higher than institutions like the free press and the academy. And other nonprofit organizations which drove civic engagement in previous generations have since more or less disappeared. Is there a way for these institutions to effectively cultivate a sense of community, of intellectual and artistic curiosity, of civic minded advocacy, without losing the public's faith, or inviting polarizing dialogs that have fueled discord in recent years?

Methods

To gain insights toward this question I embarked on a project to investigate the inner workings of museums, and their relationships to the public. I used a mixed methods approach to developing this research project. The dataset that was used to develop the sample of museums to be studied had been generated for a separate purpose, a demographic analysis of art museum staff. In that study, as an employee of Ithaca S+R, on behalf of the Mellon Foundation, I collected and analyzed datasets representing the demographics of all current museum staff. Key variables included Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Decade of Birth, Decade of Hire, and Job Category. The population included the American Alliance of Museums (1000+ members) and the Association of Art Museum Directors (277 members).

After presenting this data to museum directors at AAMD's 2015 conference in Detroit, many directors were surprised by the lack of representation we found. During the Q&A and in private discussions, many directors acknowledged the imperative to improve diversity in the

field, but were at a loss for how best to implement change. As a result, the Mellon Foundation funded a qualitative study to understand the internal practices of diverse museums, in order for the larger field to learn more.

Utilizing this dataset, I filtered out all museums for whom those four aforementioned job categories were, in aggregate, less than 20% people of color. This resulted in a cohort of roughly twenty participating museums. I asked them to complete a brief survey, which gauged their interest in participating in the study and their history in engaging with these issues. From these responses eight museums were selected which were geographically varied, various museum types, and appeared committed to deliberate diversity efforts at the leadership level. Those museums included: The Brooklyn Museum, The Studio Museum in Harlem, The Andy Warhol Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Detroit Institute of Arts, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Spelman College Museum, and the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston.

In the project design portion of this project, it was recognized that representational diversity can often be driven by more than simple organizational policies in human resources departments. It is often the product of organizational culture, as well as the ways in which the museum is perceived by and engages with the public. In order to prevent the research design from being so narrow as to exclude certain key elements of an organization's strategies, I opted for a broad research framework, which sought to understand issues of equity, diversity and inclusion distinctly, as they relate to board, staff, program and audience.

Figure 1. Guide for Research Framework

	Board	Staff	Program	Audience
Diversity				
Equity				
Inclusion				

This framework guided the conversations with each interviewee. I worked with staff at each museum to set up unstructured interviews with those in junior and senior positions, in departments across the institution, as well as external partners. In this way, interviews were guided in the direction in which the interviewee had the strongest local knowledge.

In this sense, the research design for this project followed the principles of interpretive research methods. Developed from the Chicago school tradition in the 1920s, interpretive research is a sub-methodology of qualitative sociology reflecting the “interpretive turn” that took place across the social sciences from the 1970s to the 1990s. Interpretive research reflects a phenomenological hermeneutics that privileges data contextualized by local, situated knowledge and situated knowers.²⁷

While quantitative methods traditionally associated with positivist strains of sociology were useful from the perspective of demography, to quantify the racial/ethnic identities (as the

²⁷ Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge, 2013). (6)

state records them) from a number of cultural institutions, interpretive methodologies are preferable for answering the question of how cultural institutions reflect and engage the diversity of culture in the U.S. This preference is related to several characteristics of interpretive research design, which allow for a process of “abductive reasoning,” pioneered by the pragmatist Charles Pierce: “abductive reasoning begins with a puzzle, a surprise or a tension and then seeks to explicate it by identifying the conditions that would make that puzzle less perplexing and more of a normal, or natural event,” in order to create an opportunity to discover the situated meanings of context specific data, which were acquired through observation and interviews.²⁸

Interpretive research design can be distinguished from the more dominant positivist methods in US sociology in a few key ways. Centrally, these designs do not intend to test concepts that have been defined prior to conducting the research. While there is an important research process prior to project design which explores the relevant literature on the subject and develops a sense for key concepts related to the project, what Geertz terms “an experience-distant concept,”²⁹ or what Pike called an *etic* perspective,³⁰ interpretive researchers do not rely on the underlying concepts that generated their research question in order to generate and analyze the data acquired through field work. Rather, they expect the field to influence and adjust their prior knowledge and theories. Interpretive research design is built on a foundation of flexibility, a hermeneutic iteration that allows for the updating, expansion, and contraction of prior concepts, as they are informed by the context generated from the field.

²⁸ Ibid. (27)

²⁹ Clifford Geertz, "" From the native's point of view": On the nature of anthropological understanding." *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (1974): 26-45.

³⁰ Kenneth L. Pike, "Etic and emic standpoints for the description of behavior," (1967).

In this sense, the broadness of the research framework allowed for a context specific pursuit of data with the prior assumption that findings might emerge through these intersections, which might reinforce one another in surprising ways. This instinct was heavily influenced by the text, *Diversity and Inclusion in New York City's Cultural Sector: BRIC*.³¹

In establishing the interview population for the museum case studies, I worked closely with a point person at each museum, discussing the varying levels of seniority, departments and in some cases external partners who would be ideal for interviews. The guiding principle while making these decisions was to maintain a variety of perspectives - junior and senior, men and women, new and veteran. There was a special interest in hearing from staff in the departments that were used in the criteria of the selection process. Because many museums didn't have conservation departments, this meant a strong focus on curatorial, education and senior administration positions. Throughout these discussions, additional individuals were identified to be invited to participate.

Additionally, this project sought the perspectives of individuals at organizations that partnered with the museums, in order to get outside perspectives. From these various data collection methods, one consistent theme emerged in the project: when art museums find ways for curatorial and education departments to work well together, the institution becomes a greater asset to the community. To put it another way, when the collections side of the museum and the visitor side of the museum harmonize, a fruitful public space emerges.

There is a second reason for the specific focus on the dynamics between education and curatorial departments. The education field is much more diverse than the curatorial field.

³¹ BRIC originally served as an acronym meaning "Brooklyn Information and Culture; Liam Sweeney and Roger Schonfeld, "Diversity and Inclusion in New York City's Cultural Sector: BRIC," 2016, doi:10.18665/sr.278436.

Museum educators are roughly ¼ POC, while curators are only 14% POC, nationally. Educators are often hired from the local communities the museum serves, while curators, more similar to the academic job market, are more likely to compete nationally and internationally for job opportunities. As a result, museums that have made a commitment to engaging local communities and elevating diverse voices must find ways to activate the existing cultural fluencies in their education departments. However, this cannot be done at the expense of curatorial rigor, but rather must emerge from building mutual trust between departments.

Findings³²

Understanding the current dynamics between curatorial staff and educators in the museum is dependent on understanding the museum's historical and environmental context. The social narratives that have defined the museum's home throughout the generations also necessarily inform the museum's strategy when presenting culture to those populations. Therefore, I will offer some historical context for the profiled museums before proceeding to the departmental research.

Brooklyn Museum

³² Text from this portion of the thesis is derived from three case studies, which I wrote as an analyst at Ithaka S+R, and which are publicly available on Ithaka S+R, AAMD, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's website. The Brooklyn Museum case study was co-authored by Roger Schonfeld, who joined for a number of interviews during that site visit. The Detroit Institute of Art report was co-authored by Katherine Daniel, who participated in the DIA site visit.

Roger Schonfeld and Liam Sweeney. "I Recommend Dancing": Brooklyn Museum's History of Inclusion and Moment of Transition." *Ithaka S+R*. Last Modified 23 January 2018. <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.306189>; Sweeney, Liam. "Reflecting Los Angeles, Decentralized and Global: Los Angeles County Museum of Art." *Ithaka S+R*. Last Modified 23 January 2018. <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.306187>; Sweeney, Liam and Katherine Daniel. "Becoming a Public Square: Detroit Institute of Arts." *Ithaka S+R*. Last Modified 20 September 2018. <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.309184>.

Originally established in 1823 as the Brooklyn Apprentice's Library, Brooklyn Museum staff recognize its history as a place of social inclusion. It was Brooklyn's first free circulating library, built through community organizing, and conceived in a local bar.

Museum staff point to one of its early curators to show that it has long been a progressive voice for art history, relative to its times. Stewart Culin (1858–1929), a pioneer in ethnography and one of the museum's chief curators, collected over 1,200 African objects from dealers in Europe and displayed them in the Brooklyn Museum in 1923. Culin made explicit his curatorial intention for this work, stating, "The entire collection, whatever may have been its original uses, is shown under the classification of art; as representing a creative impulse and not for the purposes of illustrating the customs of African People. It is this characteristic of expressiveness which may explain the influence Negro Art is leaving upon the work of many recent painters and sculptors." The exhibition was the first instance in an American museum of showing African art *as art*, rather than as artifact.³³

Between the Civil War and World War II, the population of Brooklyn increased twentyfold, from around 140,000 to nearly 2,700,000. Shortly after the Civil War, race relations were stressed as an increasing number of European immigrants worked to establish their foothold in Brooklyn at the expense of the black community, emphasizing a narrative of white supremacy.³⁴ Racial tensions would persist and become more complicated in the twentieth century.

³³ Kathleen Bickford Berzock and Christa Clarke, eds., *Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).

³⁴ Craig Steven Wilder, *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn 1636-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

Brooklyn was a thriving base of manufacturing for much of the early twentieth century, and during World War II the Brooklyn Navy Yard experienced dramatic growth, tripling in terms of employment—from 32,948 employees in 1941 to 96,090 in 1943.³⁵ But during the postwar years, Brooklyn’s demographics changed dramatically. White flight, fueled by government subsidies in outlying communities, created a dramatic shift in the racial composition of the borough; between 1940 and 1990, Brooklyn gained 1.3 million POC and lost 1.5 million white people.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, manufacturing industries collapsed, the Navy Yard closed, and the borough grappled with issues of crime and disenfranchisement. While this was happening, however, a meaningful reinvestment was being made in the once-popular theater, Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). In 1969, arts administrator Harvey Lichtenstein partnered with Wall Street banker Seth Faison to bring BAM back to prominence. They involved modern dance pioneer Alvin Ailey, who emphasized a focus on marketing to Brooklynites rather than bussing audiences in from Manhattan. They persuaded the Chelsea Theater Center to move in, presented the first production of Amiri Baraka’s *Slave Ship*, and eventually became a home away from home to choreographer Pina Bausch. By 1976 BAM’s audience had grown six-fold. The organization began providing in-kind support for local and federal development projects like the Cinderella Project and the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation. BAM’s focus on modern dance, its choice to engage its local community instead of pursuing the Manhattan audience, and its investments in its own neighborhood played a large role in a cultural renaissance in downtown Brooklyn.³⁶

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Julia L. Foulkes, “Streets and Stages: Urban Renewal and the Arts After World War II,” *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 2 (2010): 413-34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25790364>.

These cultural forces interacted with a shifting real estate market to bring about significant displacement. Responding to cheap industrial waterfront real estate, developers and city officials pursued a course of “urban renewal” that would lead to the gentrification of many parts of the borough, relying on a narrative of obsolescence to make the removal of industrial work and deregulation of rent politically palatable.³⁷

This complicates a renaissance narrative, as the borough’s mainstream cultural capital and real estate values have increased since the 1990s. It is within this context that the Brooklyn Museum operates as a public institution. It is part of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) in New York City, a group of 33 organizations built on city land that receive substantial municipal funds.³⁸

Curatorial Controversies

The Brooklyn Museum has been the site of a number of protests since the 2000s. Most recently, the museum has faced sharp criticism over the hire of Dr. Kristen Windmuller-Luna, who accepted an offer in the museum’s African Art department as a part time consulting curator. Protestors insisted that the museum’s failure to hire a person of African or African American descent into the position was tone deaf. This incident, which became a viral story expanding beyond the arts and culture sector in part because of its proximity to the release of *Black Panther*, the highest grossing film of 2018, challenges the museum’s history as a progressive institution.³⁹

³⁷ Winifred Curran, “Gentrification and the Nature of Work: Exploring the Links in Williamsburg, Brooklyn,” *Environment and Planning A* 36, no. 7 (2004): 1243–1258; Weber, Rachel, “Extracting Value from the City: Neoliberalism and Urban Redevelopment,” *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 519–540.

³⁸ “City-Owned Institutions,” NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, accessed May 07, 2017, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcla/html/funding/institutions.shtml>.

³⁹ The hiring decision has often been compared to a scene from *Black Panther*, in which a white woman who is a curator of African Art erroneously explains the history of an artifact that derives from the culture of the black visitor, who is observing the work.

Although Brooklyn Museum's curatorial department is much more diverse than the national average, its hiring choices are highly visible to its local environment, bringing scrutiny to their operations in a way many other museums have not experienced.

While reviewing literature from the 1990s and early 2000s, it is fascinating to see a very different kind of criticism confront the museum. For instance, under the directorship of Arnold Lehman, who led the museum from 1997 to 2015, the museum redesigned its façade. It introduced a pavilion, which was thrust toward Eastern Parkway at ground level, in place of the traditional Beaux Arts staircase that replicated the front of the Met. The 2004 inauguration of the new pavilion was accompanied with an exhibition called *Open House*, a comprehensive survey of Brooklyn artists. In response to the exhibition, the *New Criterion* wrote, "Like us, you probably know several serious artists who live and work in Brooklyn. None was represented in this silly exhibition." Rather, they claimed, "The curators got every black, Hispanic and female artist they could lay their hands on." Among the artists included in the exhibition were Martha Rosler⁴⁰ and Rico Gatson.⁴¹

Open House clearly ran counter to the expectations of many for a museum responsible for vast collections of antiquities. This sample of reactions indicates that encyclopedic museums experience pressure to conform to familiar expectations from certain critics. Board member Saundra Williams-Cornwell spoke to this point.⁴² She was inspired to join the museum's board after *Sensation* (1999), an exhibition including an iconoclastic portrait of the Madonna, sparked a

⁴⁰ Martha Rosler is a feminist artist well known for her 1975 video art piece *Semiotics of the Kitchen*.

⁴¹ An artist currently featured in a solo exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem, Rico Gatson was reviewed in the *New York Times* the same month the *New Criterion* article was published. See Holland Cotter, "Rico Gatson," *New York Times*, May 20, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/21/arts/art-in-review-rico-gatson.html?_r=0.

⁴² Saundra Williams-Cornwell is African American

controversy that threatened municipal support for the museum.⁴³ In considering the Brooklyn Museum's relationship to the press, she made an important distinction, recognizing that criticism can be valid when it addresses a lack of rigor in scholarship. "But if you're going to base your criticism on the political elements and not on the quality of what's being shown, I think that's just noise," she said. In hiring Anne Pasternak as its director in 2015, the board made a clear decision to continue and expand Lehman's initiatives to be deliberately inclusive of a broad set of underrepresented communities and to engage in dialogues around social justice. One of the ways this approach has calcified is in the museum's "Target First Saturdays" programming.

First Saturday

Famous in Brooklyn for big dance parties, talented local performers, and multigenerational crowds, it is hard to imagine the spectacle that is Target First Saturdays at the Brooklyn Museum. Staff at the museum describe it as utopian. At an event in the spring of 2017, it was evident that the energetic crowd that earlier filled the museum's pavilion had spilled into the front plaza. Visitors are welcome to mill through the lobby—drinking beer, eating empanadas, and striking up conversations with neighbors—or press on to the exhibitions. During First Saturdays, ticketed exhibitions are reduced in price. There are also workshops and performances in the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Auditorium. In the third-floor atrium, a dense crowd took part in a dance workshop.

⁴³ Abby Goodnough, "Giuliani Threatens to Evict Museum Over Art Exhibit," *New York Times*, September 24, 1999, <https://partners.nytimes.com/library/arts/092499brooklyn-museum.html>.

Figure 2: Target First Saturday Dance Workshop, Photo by Amanda Parmer



After the dance lesson, the DJ started a set and the room shirked the choreography and continued dancing. The lights were kept low, and surrounding the dance floor were Rodin statues. It felt carnivalesque. Lehman describes how he shifted the atmosphere: “I kind of reordered the guards that they had to be really hospitable. I mean, no one could be on top of a painting with a ballpoint pen, but they weren’t to shush or ask them to step away; it was their neighbors who were there.” In a gentrifying part of the borough where many establishments tacitly signal which kind of patrons they cater to, Target First Saturdays is the rare community fixture where Brooklyn’s various ethnic communities engage casually.

One criticism of Target First Saturdays is that the large crowds are drawn to dance, not to engage with the art. However, during this event, which drew over 17,000 people, the Egyptian and American collections attracted strong crowds. While the permanent collections often seem empty during the week, during Target First Saturdays they see attendance more akin to those regularly attracted by the special exhibitions.

The first iteration of Target First Saturdays in the mid-1990s drew 2,000 people, and the event grew steadily until, after fifteen years, attendance suddenly spiked. “Two and a half years ago something happened, some viral event,” Lehman said. “We went to 17,000, then 21,000, then 25,000, then 30,000 people at a First Saturday. And [the city] closed us down. There were 5,000 people out on the plaza waiting to get in. It just was not sustainable. We had this harsh reality of trying to figure out what to do to avoid disappointing all these people who came from all over the city. We had members of city council who came from the Bronx to see what was going on.” Lehman told us there was discussion of installing egresses in the form of large multistory outdoor staircases that would accommodate the NYFD regulations, but he couldn’t find a way to make it work financially. In some cases, when the dance party grew too big for the atrium, they would hold it in the parking lot. Lehman said, “There is the issue of how museums think of themselves as civic places in addition to being a museum per se. The nature of being a committed civic institution changes the dynamic. I recommend dancing to all these institutions. Big time.”

The civic nature of the Brooklyn Museum was raised by several interviewees. Eugenie Tsai, the John and Barbara Vogelstein Curator of Contemporary Art, invoked it when addressing

the criticisms that some of the exhibitions have been too populist, lacking substance.⁴⁴ Tsai, who has curated exhibitions and long-term installations such as *Raw/Cooked* (2011),⁴⁵ and *21: Selections of Contemporary Art from the Brooklyn Museum* (2008),⁴⁶ acknowledged the danger of overt populism (or what some call “disneyfying” the museum) in exhibitions but suggested that for public institutions there is a “sweet spot.” She stated that “at a place like the Brooklyn Museum that takes public money, you really have a responsibility to your visitors to give them a chance to interact with art and culture in ways that they don’t have a chance to in their day-to-day lives.”

Lehman explained that in order to identify this “sweet spot,” the curatorial team conceptualized a three-circle Venn diagram, with one circle representing community, one representing collections, and one representing mission. Intersecting these three aspects of the museum guided their curatorial practice, which in some instances drew negative media attention, Lehman told us. For instance, the *Observer* highlighted two Brooklyn Museum exhibitions, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* (2002) and *Hip-Hop Nation: Roots Rhyme and Rage* (2000), saying, “When arts institutions invoke ‘the community’ rather than the public at large as their primary constituency, you can be certain that something crucial—like, say, artistic standards—is being sacrificed on the altar of identity politics, in this case the politics of race and class.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Robin Pogrebin, “Brooklyn Museum’s Populism Hasn’t Lured Crowds,” *New York Times*, June 14, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/15/arts/design/15museum.html?pagewanted=all&module=Search&mabReward=elbias%3Aw%2C%7B%22%22%3A%22RI%3A17%22%7D&_r=0.

⁴⁵ “Raw/Cooked: Kristof Wickman,” Brooklyn Museum, accessed May 07, 2017, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/raw_cooked_wickman.

⁴⁶ “21: Selections of Contemporary Art from the Brooklyn Museum,” Brooklyn Museum, accessed May 07, 2017, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/21_selections/.

⁴⁷ Hilton Kramer, “The Brooklyn Museum Gives Open House on Dumbing Down,” *Observer*, May 16, 2004, <http://observer.com/2004/05/the-brooklyn-museum-gives-open-house-on-dumbing-down/>.

While inclusivity fits into narratives of institutional identity for many contemporary and culturally specific museums, the above criticisms of the Brooklyn Museum reflect some of the frictions that encyclopedic museums may encounter from audiences or critics who expect to have access to a more familiar, and perhaps exclusionary, experience with art. In order to determine whether inclusivity fits into the institution's mission, it is therefore important to think critically about who the museum sees as its audience.

Public Programming and Curatorial

Some of the museum's structural changes have focused specifically on elevating the influence of their audience's voices upon curatorial perspectives. This is perhaps most evident in the closer relationship between the public programming and curatorial departments. Public programming had been part of the education department until fall 2016, when Pasternak made it part of curatorial. As Alicia Boone, director of public programming, explained, "We kind of have our finger on the pulse of the public." Her department is responsible for programs like Target First Saturdays, which is usually organized as a thematic response to an exhibition, or a timely larger theme such as Pride Month or Women's History Month. She told us, "It's really significant, this switch for public programming. The department now has a seat at the table; we can participate in a conversation about what exhibitions should be put up."

Boone now offers public programming's perspective to colleagues like Carmen Hermo, assistant curator at the Sackler Center for Feminist Art. Hermo indicated that having programming at the table was helpful, and welcome: "Public programming for us, even in the *Year of Yes*, can bring out things not as present in the objects—queer perspectives,

environmental activism, or indigenous issues.”⁴⁸ Herno added that programming could be helpful in bringing attention to the absence of a certain community. But she clarified that the conversation isn’t antagonistic; the relationship is collaborative, rather than tokenizing. And as Boone put it, “We don’t need to dilute curatorial to make this work.”

Boone was surprised to learn that the Brooklyn Museum had been selected for this study based on its diversity, particularly because she had recently moved from the more diverse education department (50 percent POC) to curatorial (18 percent POC).⁴⁹ As she put it, “The education department is truly diverse. It feels really healthy. It’s good for conversation.” In her new role, she told us, “I’m trying to learn how to say things diplomatically. To figure out the timing. To offer feedback in the feedback session. I have no curatorial experience, but my voice is important.” This challenge is twofold. Boone is bringing knowledge from her connection to the Brooklyn community, and from the experiences that come from working in a setting as diverse as the education department. She is working to translate this experience into useful advice in a curatorial context. That curatorial welcomes public programming’s voice is noteworthy, speaking to a collaborative spirit across departments, rather than a siloing of expertise. Take, for instance, the 2017 exhibition of radical black female artists, *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965–1985*. The title came from the education department.

⁴⁸ A Year of Yes takes the 10 year anniversary of the Sackler Center as an opportunity to reflect on the history of feminism through a variety of programs. “A Year of Yes: Reimagining Feminism at the Brooklyn Museum.” Brooklyn Museum: A Year of Yes: Reimagining Feminism at the Brooklyn Museum. Accessed May 07, 2017. https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/year_of_yes_reimagining_feminism.

⁴⁹ Data from the 2015 Demographic Survey of Art Museums.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Los Angeles County comprises slightly over 4,000 square miles of Southern Californian land, includes 88 cities, and roughly 10 million people. Its GDP, at \$664 billion, falls between that of Switzerland and Saudi Arabia.⁵⁰ Located on the Pacific coast, proximate to Mexico, the region serves as a point of entry to the United States for many cultures.

Los Angeles is the largest of those 88 cities, and the second-largest city in the United States, with a population of nearly 4 million. For decades, it has been a “majority minority” city, and home to many distinct ethnic communities. The city has one of the most diverse populations in the United States, and indeed in the world: the largest Hispanic population in the US resides in Los Angeles, as does the largest Asian population. Los Angeles played a significant role as a settling point during the Great Migration, gaining a large African American population who fled the Jim Crow South in the twentieth century. The city is home to a variety of ethnic enclaves, with prominent populations of Armenian, Turkish, Iranian, Korean, Thai, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, and Japanese immigrants, among others.⁵¹

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art’s origins and development are closely related to the growth of the city. When its predecessor, the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art opened in 1913, Los Angeles was experiencing a rapid expansion. In 1870 its population was less than 6,000 people. Fifty years later it was over half a million.⁵² Embedded in

⁵⁰ “Why LA County,” Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, accessed September 27, 2017, <https://laedc.org/wtc/chooselacounty/>.

⁵¹ Mohammad A. Qadeer, *Multicultural Cities*, (Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles: University of Toronto Press, 2016); Josh Kun and Laura Pulido, *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition*, (London: University of California Press, 2013).

⁵² Carolyn Stewart, “Census of Population and Housing,” US Census Bureau, August 19, 2011, accessed September 27, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>.

that expansion is a history of social unrest. From genocide of Native American,⁵³ and lynchings of Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century,⁵⁴ to disenfranchisement of African Americans⁵⁵ and Latinx in the twentieth,⁵⁶ Los Angeles has been a site for minority communities to organize, fight for equal rights, and represent the distinctive cultures that both compose and challenge notions of American identity.⁵⁷ As the county's museum, LACMA has been uniquely positioned to reflect these expressions.

In some cases, its constituents have protested the museum's failure to do so. Throughout the 1960s, protestors attempted to address the museum's homogenous representations of culture, both in terms of race and ethnicity, as well as gender. In one instance, a group of roughly 150 demonstrators, many of them artists, marched in protest of a modern art exhibition called *Seventeen Artists of the 60s* (1981), which featured only white men. Among the ranks of protesters was artist Carol Nieman, who was quoted by the *Los Angeles Times*: "A person who goes into a public art facility—maybe for the first time in their life—could walk in and by the fact that all the work on the walls in this particular show was done by white males, draw the conclusion that all artists working here in the 60s and 70s were white males. That's simply not

⁵³ Robert F. Heizer and Mary Anne Whipple, *The California Indians: A Sourcebook* (London: University of California Press, 1971).

⁵⁴ William D. Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

⁵⁵ Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty: From Watts to East L.A.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ Lisa García Bedolla, *Fluid Borders: Latino Power, Identity, and Politics in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

true.”⁵⁸ This statement from nearly 40 years ago echoes concerns that are all too familiar as museums still struggle to reflect the diversity of their communities.

Partially as a result of similar protests and grassroots movements within and outside the museum walls, LACMA became a leader in representing African American art in the latter half of the twentieth century, as Kellie Jones explains in *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*.⁵⁹ In 1965 Melvin Edwards had his first museum exhibition there as part of *Five Younger American Artists*. In 1968 the museum held an exhibition titled *Sculpture of Black Africa—The Paul Tishman Collection*. When attendance from the African American community was low, LACMA staff gathered and appealed to the museum’s security guards, who were mostly black, to develop a strategy to bring the black community to the exhibition. The result was the Black Culture Festival, which drew 4,000 people to LACMA. In 1971 the exhibition *Three Graphic Artists* included Charles White with emerging artists David Hammons and Timothy Washington. The next year, the exhibition *Los Angeles 1972: A Panorama of Black Artists* invited 50 black artists to display their work in the museum. And in 1976, aligned with the bicentennial, LACMA held a large historical exhibition, *Two Centuries of Black American Art*. These exhibitions were helpful in establishing the careers of many black artists, and brought prominence and material security to some of the Los Angeles–based galleries supporting their work, such as Brockman and Heritage. Such institutional support for the visual culture of African Americans was negligible at the time, on a national scale.

⁵⁸ The *LA Times* also reported that 29 of 713 artists in group exhibitions ten years prior to the article were female, only one of fifty-four single artist shows were female, and over 99 percent of the art displayed in the museum at the time was male.

⁵⁹ Kellie Jones, *South of Pico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

But, the museum did not become a presence for many Los Angeles residents until fairly recently. One employee recalled that when she began working at LACMA, most municipal departments weren't even aware the city had an encyclopedic museum. Museum staff were strikingly consistent in describing LACMA as “sleepy” and “stuffy” until roughly the last decade. Under new leadership, the museum has worked to change this perception, by shifting its focus toward a more visitor centered approach, configuring itself as a part of the experience economy and working in many new directions to reach traditionally excluded audiences in Los Angeles. LACMA has some unique qualifications for this type of makeover: As the youngest encyclopedic museum in the country, the museum could be redesigned in ways other beaux-arts structures could not; as the largest museum west of the Mississippi, there was potential to become a central hub for Angelinos; and, the location of southern California meant that diversity was a central element of the museum's goal to reflect its environment.

Audience Engagement: Curators and Educators

The shift toward considering the visitor's experience in a museum can sometimes be framed as an invitation, creating a sense of welcome. Occasionally, though, it is framed differently—as an opportunity for the institution to learn about itself.

José Luis Blondet is the curator for special initiatives at LACMA. He currently works as a curator in the education department, in a role director Michael Govan created for him. As a result, he has an unusual perspective when it comes to the dynamics between educators, curators, and audiences.

There are three kinds of archives for a curator to study, as Blondet sees it: collections, documents, and audiences. “We need to treat the history of audience as a living archive,” he explained. Through this framework, Blondet focuses his work on creating access points for

audiences to contemporary art, bringing the expertise of both a curator and an educator. “It’s not dumbing down,” Blondet said; “I hate that expression.” Rather, creating access points involves “playing by the rules the artwork has proposed.” In some cases, this can leave a work difficult to understand, or even off-putting. Blondet wants to grant the audience permission not to like everything, and to approach contemporary art with their own language, rather than relying on inside-baseball discourses that can feel exclusionary.

In doing so, he has been working closely with the museum’s contemporary art curators, among them Rita Gonzalez, acting head of the contemporary art department. Gonzalez spoke to the connection between departments: “The relationship with education tends to be strong because of the connections between contemporary curators and colleagues in education. For instance, right now Blondet and I are working on an exhibition together. Strong links emerge from that.”

Contemporary Art, a Point of Entry

While it is the central focus of the Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM)—a 2008 addition to the LACMA campus and host this year to multiple PST:LA/LA exhibitions—contemporary art is also integrated into historic collections in several instances, creating access points between the present moment and ancient works.

For instance, the galleries on the fourth floor of the Art of the Americas building progress chronologically, exploring art of Ancient Americas, colonial art of the Americas, and finally contemporary works from Latin American artists, such as Roberto Matta’s *Burn Baby Burn* (1965-66), which represents the Watts riots.

Figure 3: Burn Baby Burn. © ARS, New York / ADAGP, Paris. Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA



Curator and department head of Latin American art, Ilona Katzew, said she included the contemporary gallery at the end of the progression to create a sense of continuity with the present, thereby connecting museum goers' experience of historical collections with events that have shaped the modern landscape of the city.

In the adjacent building, Linda Komaroff, curator and head of the art of the Middle East department, has made this practice central to her curation of traditional Islamic art. On display amid medieval works are contemporary pieces by Arab artists whose work “builds creative links between the past, present, and future” of Islamic culture.⁶⁰ Komaroff described an epiphany she had at an exhibition at the Tate Modern Museum in London several years ago. The installation, which displayed the journals of contemporary Islamic artists, succeeded in engaging the audience in the artists' lives, a challenge she said she has struggled with in Western settings: “People were looking at the journals and engaging with Islamic art in a way that they hadn't before.” In observing the audience's response to the exhibition, Komaroff's relationship to her

⁶⁰ “Islamic Art Now: Contemporary Art of the Middle East,” LACMA official website, accessed September 27, 2017, <http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/islamic-art-now-contemporary-art-middle-east>.

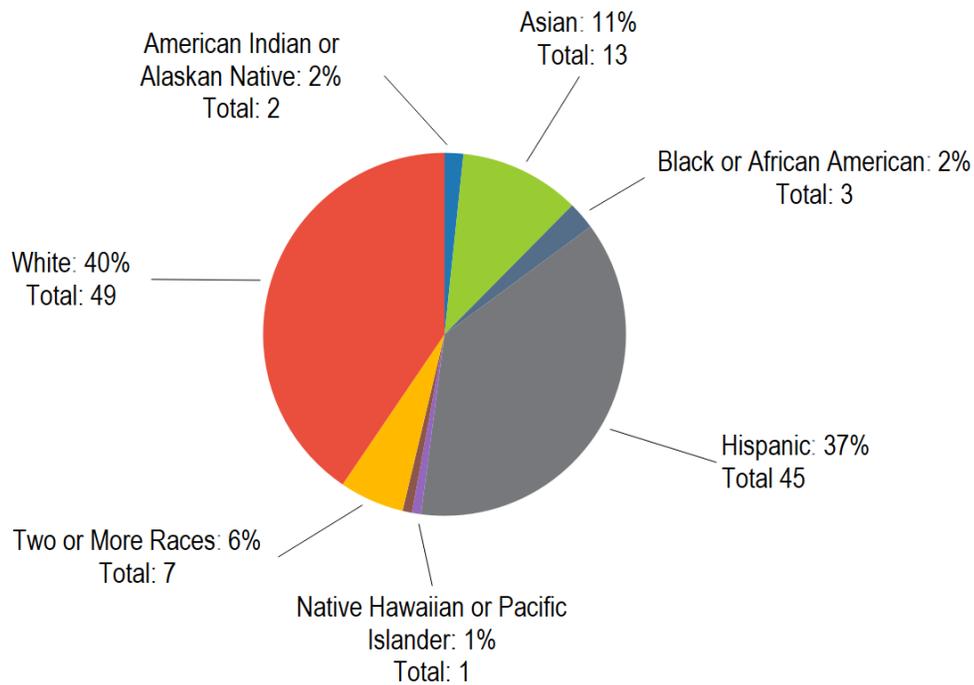
own curatorial practice was transformed. In her view, the contemporary works “draw in people who wouldn’t otherwise care,” and she sees it as her job to build empathy by displaying Islamic culture to an American audience. Now she actively pursues contemporary Islamic art and integrates it with older works. She observes that this method works particularly well with youth: “Kids are mesmerized when the images look like them. It’s more interesting! The younger you are the more, well, narcissistic you are. So that’s where you start. Rather than search far and wide, why not change the generation before, change their attitudes to want to pursue this, to feel included and welcome. To feel intrigued. You no longer grab kids based on history, they are more interested in present.” In this sense, Komaroff’s curatorial practice has come to embrace an effort typically associated with the work of education departments.

Collaborations and Mentorships

Both curators and educators at the museum recognize the collaborative spirit that has developed at LACMA as unique. “Educators are often seen as policing curatorial,” Virginia Moon, assistant curator of Korean art, said of the field. “Here at LACMA it’s the complete opposite.” This was a common refrain among the museums profiled in the case studies; when an education and curatorial department achieve a healthy collaboration, staff consider it remarkable.

At LACMA, educators are thought of, in some sense, as translators—versed in the language of curation and art history, but also deeply familiar with the communities they serve. Nearly half of the educators are Hispanic, matching the population of the city, which is 47 percent Hispanic, as seen in Figure 1. Staff reported that it was essential for educators to be of the communities they serve, in order to build trust and strengthen connections. Director of Education, Jane Burrell told us, “We want people who are bilingual” in the education department.

Figure 4. LACMA Educators



In addition to representing a prominent ethnic community, at LACMA many museum educators have expertise in an art history field, whether through an undergraduate or graduate degree in art history, or curatorial experience. LACMA is the rare museum where curators, such as Blondet and Burrell, have transitioned into education departments. This has cultivated a high degree of trust. Educators respect the scholarly approach, and curators also recognize that many LACMA educators bring the perspective of the community they are trying to reach, a valuable asset.

We heard from staff at LACMA and elsewhere that it is uncommon for curators to transition to education departments. In part, compensation is responsible for this. The 2017 AAMD salary survey revealed that the average entry-level salary for education positions is

\$37,801.⁶¹ That is the second-lowest-paid position featured in the salary survey, after security officer (\$33,974). Education coordinator Amber Edwards told us the low pay for educators also acts as a barrier in the field to diversifying the museum, similar to unpaid internships: “If we’re not paying a living wage in big cities, it’s going to be hard to get people to apply if they are not already privileged in some way.”

Edwards told us that the education department is a force for diversifying the museum, in part because they interface with high school students in underserved communities, alerting them to opportunities for internships, fellowships, and hiring. “It’s grassroots,” she said. “We’re able to see potential. Some might not have the written skills to impress on paper, but they have everything else. They have the magic.”

Nicolas Orozco-Valdivia, a recent graduate of the Mellon Undergraduate Curatorial Fellowship program, was one such individual. His first point of contact with LACMA was through the education department, where he received guidance from Edwards and other colleagues. Edwards explained that his talent was clear to her from an early point, and she made an effort to build a deeper connection between him and the museum. “There’s a little spark, but it’s going to become a fireworks explosion,” she said of the moment. “It goes back to mentoring. We championed him.” Burrell confirmed that these are deliberate efforts in the department: “We’ve hired many of our interns. We’re conscious of shepherding people through the field. We’re especially concerned with mentoring. We want our staff to be a part of the community.” The Mellon Undergraduate Curatorial Fellowship is thus a strong asset to LACMA’s efforts at outreach and diversification, and provides an example of a formalized mentorship program in

⁶¹ Association of Art Museum Directors, “2017 Salary Survey”, July 3, 2017, accessed September 28, 2017, https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/2017%20AAMD%20Salary%20Survey_0.pdf.

practice. In LACMA's *Unframed* blog—which Govan established in an effort to make the museum more porous by encouraging staff to write publicly about their work—Orozco-Valdivia writes, “I’ve been given access as a fellow to the specific way in which museums make stories out of this all-messy world, using physical objects as a means of interpreting the past, questioning the present, and envisioning a future.” A few of his experiences with the fellowship included working closely with curators, learning from conservators about handling materials, considering visitor experience with the education department, and visiting the Getty Research Institute to conduct archival research, along with LACMA’s storage facility for large works from their permanent collection. In short, the veneer of the museum has been removed, the operations made apparent. Orozco-Valdivia is one of the few undergraduate curatorial fellows who had the opportunity to compose an exhibition in his time at the museum. Pictured below, Orozco-Valdivia describes his exhibition titled *Labor and Photography* (2017): “Collectively the photographs offer a rebuke to capitalism’s reductive vision of work as either a daily grind for survival or a money-driven race to the top by encouraging a more nuanced approach to the many ways that concepts of labor and representations of laborers shape our lives.”

Figure 5: Labor and Photography. Photo by LACMA



Orozco-Valdivia is one of a number of students who have engaged in curatorial fellowships intended to diversify the field. Gonzalez told us that these efforts are beginning to yield results: “I’ve seen it in the Getty’s multicultural undergraduate internship program; I’ve seen it at least in effect here at LACMA, seen how that internship program has diversified SoCal landscape. You see people who had their first internship through [the Getty] program. Starting to see it through Mellon fellowship as well.” LACMA recently hired a Mellon undergraduate curatorial fellow from one of its partner museums, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gonzalez recognized the value of mentorship in her current position at LACMA, giving credit to Noriega for guiding her curatorial vision. Mentoring is “hugely significant” for diversifying the field, she said.

At LACMA, the education department has actively recruited talented emerging curators and granted them access to the institution. That kind of deliberate pathway development is necessary for established museums to track with demographic change. Furthermore, the openness that LACMA curators bring to collaborations with educators has activated the museum as much more deeply engaged with the public in Los Angeles.

Detroit Institute of Arts

Founded as the Detroit Museum of Art in 1885, the museum came by its current name after its rapidly expanding collection necessitated a move to its present location on Woodward Avenue in 1927. Prior to that, in 1919, the museum was incorporated into the city as a municipal department, enabling it to purchase some of its most valuable works of art using city funds. However, it also ceased to be an independent entity in a move that would jeopardize the museum's existence nearly a hundred years later.

By all accounts, Detroit was a booming commercial and industrial hub prior to World War II and home to a critical American industry—automobile manufacturing.⁶² During the first three decades of the 20th century, Detroit's population grew fivefold from 300,000 to 1.5 million as Henry Ford attracted domestic and international workers to the city with the promise of high wages.⁶³ Along with the influx of white American and European workers, people of color also moved into the city, and by the 1920s their numbers had grown to one tenth of the city's total population. A surge in defense jobs from 1940-43 brought another half a million people to

⁶² Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History," Motor City: The Story of Detroit | Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, January 01, 1970, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-now/motor-city-story-detroit>.

⁶³ Alex L. Swan, "The Harlem and Detroit Riots of 1943: A Comparative Analysis," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 16 (1971): 75-93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40999915>.

Detroit. Segregationist practices in housing and labor exacerbated racial tensions and eventually began to disrupt Detroit's factories as workers took part in union strikes and strikes pertaining to racial issues. The automobile industry began to decentralize from Detroit in the 1950s, and the city's population of 1.85 million began to decline as workers followed manufacturing jobs to suburbs and other states. Automation had also started to replace many of the jobs that had traditionally been performed by assembly-line workers, so that by the start of the 2010s, one in five Detroit adults did not have work in the formal economy.⁶⁴

Racial tensions continued to grow nationally until, on July 23, 1967, they erupted once again in one of the worst instances of civil unrest in U.S. history as the African American community rose up against a notoriously brutal police force. Forty-three people were killed and the city sustained \$36 billion in damages.⁶⁵ Residents fled the city for the suburbs in a mass exodus. Those who remained were often unable to move for financial reasons, or would not have been welcome in suburbs that had segregated by race and ethnicity. Native Detroit author Ze'ev Chafets described a point system whereby "prospective buyers were rated by skin color, accent, religion and other criteria, including a 'typically American way of life.' Under the system, blacks, Mexicans and Orientals [sic] were automatically given a failing grade, as were virtually all Jews and southern Europeans."⁶⁶ The dramatic decrease in population left the city with a

⁶⁴ Amy Padnani, "Anatomy of Detroit's Decline," *The New York Times*, December 8, 2013, accessed July 26, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/08/17/us/detroit-decline>.

⁶⁵ Thomas J. Sugrue, "Conclusion: Crisis: Detroit and the Fate of Postindustrial America," in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 259-271, Princeton University Press, 2005, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rhfq.18>.

⁶⁶ Ze'ev Chafets, "The Tragedy of Detroit," *The New York Times*, July 29, 1990, accessed July 5, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/29/magazine/the-tragedy-of-detroit.html?pagewanted=all>.

vastly diminished tax base. Mismanagement of the city's finances across multiple administrations eventually led the city to file for bankruptcy in 2013.⁶⁷

As a result of its ties to the city, DIA has faced similar challenges. The city of Detroit withdrew its funding for acquisitions in 1955, and gradual reductions in taxpayer support starting in 1990 made the museum reliant on fundraising for the majority of its operating budget by 2006.⁶⁸ In 2012, the museum requested and won a ten-year millage from the surrounding tri-county area, the success of which former director Graham Beal largely credits to a reinstatement undertaken from 1999-2007 to make the museum more visitor-oriented and engaging.⁶⁹ After Detroit declared bankruptcy, the museum's collection was seen by some as an asset that could be liquidated to cover the city's financial deficits. As the specter of deaccessioning to finance public debt loomed in 2013 and 2014, judges, city officials, the governor and state legislators, and leaders of major foundations came together to seek an alternative solution, which became known as the "grand bargain."⁷⁰ To save the collection, over \$800 million was raised by foundations, private donors, and the state of Michigan. This unprecedented collaboration between major foundations, the city of Detroit, and the state allowed the city to preserve public workers' pensions and protected the collection for the public, in perpetuity, in an independent charitable trust.⁷¹ It also required the museum to develop five programs intended to serve the state of

⁶⁷ Nathan Bomey and John Gallagher, "How Detroit Went Broke: The Answers May Surprise You—and Don't Blame Coleman Young," September 15, 2013, *Detroit Free Press*, accessed June 30, 2017, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2013/09/15/how-detroit-went-broke-the-answers-may-surprise-you-and/77152028/>.

⁶⁸ The 2006 operating budget was \$31 million.

⁶⁹ Graham W. J. Beal, "What's the Big Idea? Rethinking the Permanent Collection," in *Remix: Changing Conversations in Museums of the Americas*, edited by Selma Holo and Mari-Tere Álvarez, 172-79, University of California Press, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt19rmbt3.36>.

⁷⁰ Randy Kennedy, "'Grand Bargain' Saves the Detroit Institute of Arts," *The New York Times*, November 07, 2014, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/08/arts/design/grand-bargain-saves-the-detroit-institute-of-arts.html>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Michigan. These include biennial traveling exhibitions, an annual professional development program with the Michigan Museum Association, an expansion of the museum's outreach program Inside|Out, discounted conservation services for Michigan museums, and development of a new education program. It also was required to raise \$100 million for the city of Detroit. Thanks to the grand bargain and the millage to support the museum's operating costs, DIA is now more financially secure than it has been in many years.⁷²

But the city of Detroit faces an uneven recovery. While downtown and midtown, comprising four percent of the city's population, have experienced growth, the narrative of recovery conceals steep inequities in income and access to facilities and services.⁷³ Juanita Moore, director of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History located across the street from DIA, describes Detroit's fiscal and racial challenges as a model through which America can learn: "Detroit has all the problems of urban America. People think that this is the only place with these challenges but I think that these problems are so essentially American that if you can solve it in Detroit, you can solve it anywhere." Under DIA's current director Salvador Salort-Pons's leadership, the museum aims to contribute to a more equitable recovery by embracing and reflecting Detroit's innate diversity, inside and outside its walls. But the process of building trust with historically excluded communities takes time. As Ken Morris, manager of evaluation and research, noted "I think DIA is in a place where they're thinking about the difference between diversity and inclusion and equity. But organizations are like people in that they have some idea of what needs to be done, but doing that is not easy and it's messy. So for

⁷² Neal Rubin, "DIA on Track to Self-sufficiency." *The Detroit News*, May 14, 2014. Accessed July 5, 2017. <http://www.detroitnews.com/story/entertainment/arts/2017/05/14/dia-millage-endowment/101696740/>.

⁷³ Laura A. Reese et al., "'It's Safe to Come, We've Got Lattes': Development Disparities in Detroit," *Cities* 60 (2017): doi:10.1016/j.cities.2016.10.014.

me it's a great thing to even be in an organization that says, 'We want to connect with the African American community.' For me that's a significant change in where the organization has been and where it is now."⁷⁴

Determining Meaning: Interpretation, Evaluation, and Curation

In November 2007, 90 galleries were reinstalled at the Detroit Institute of Arts with nearly 5,000 objects from the museum's permanent collection. This ambitious reinstallation reflected an adaptation of Beverly Serrell's "Big Idea" exhibition method, in which art objects are selected to align with a unified interpretation of a theme.⁷⁵ The reinstallation was created through a collaborative process with curators and interpreters/educators, a process that the museum has carried forward in its current exhibition practices.

The transformation came out of an emergency. Failing walls, asbestos issues, and problems with crowd circulation led to a large-scale construction project, which created an opportunity to refresh the galleries. Under the leadership of former director Graham Beal, the reinstallation team developed guidelines for the museum's new approach to exhibitions: "Interpretation is better understood as a means of communication between the museum and its audience, in which 1) the audience is encouraged to engage in satisfying experiences; and 2) the museum deepens its understanding of its audience for the purpose of better serving its visitors."⁷⁶ The reinstallation served as a turning point for DIA. The museum has increasingly identified itself as being visitor-centered since it reopened in 2007, a characteristic of its mission that has

⁷⁴ Morris has worked in the private sector and academia in the region. He is African American and has lived in Detroit since childhood.

⁷⁵ Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

⁷⁶ David W. Penney, "Reinventing the Detroit Institute of Arts: The Reinstallation Project 2002-2007," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 52, no. 1 (2009): doi:10.1111/j.2151-6952.2009.tb00331.x.

been reinforced by the millage and grand bargain. Still, the reinstallation did not succeed in connecting with audiences in the city of Detroit. While the collection may have grown more accessible to the casual museum goer, that audience has demographically remained homogenous.

Interpretation and evaluation are both relatively new approaches in the art museum field, and DIA has been a leader in both areas. The reinstallation integrated interpretive and evaluative processes deeply in the presentation of its collection. As Ken Morris, manager of evaluation and research, noted, “Within the art museum community, DIA has always been considered to be at the forefront of the [evaluation] movement.” Morris has been involved in evaluation in the museum for fifteen years, beginning prior to the reinstallation. His team conducts surveys of visitors to help the museum better understand their experience with exhibitions. In some cases, Morris and his colleagues also conduct research outside the museum walls to better understand the communities they are trying to reach. He observed that this research serves two functions: the team is able to collect feedback from community members, and, “Just by virtue of doing that there’s a level of community outreach.” Whether or not it’s intentional, Morris recognizes that conducting research outside DIA’s walls helps to make the museum more visible. When asked about the museum’s new focus on underserved populations, Morris commented that, “When we help make people aware of what’s here, and help make people comfortable when they’re here, then we have them, so to speak. They were people that we weren’t working to connect with before, and now we are working to connect with them.”

One of the strategies DIA has adopted for connecting with underrepresented communities is to show more art that reflects their cultures. In some cases this has involved new collaborations and partnerships, expanding the network of Detroit-based organizations connected to the museum.

Detroit '67

In 2017, one such partnership centered around the museum's efforts to reflect on the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 rebellion. The museum collaborated with the Detroit Free Press' Freep Film Festival to produce *12th and Clairmount*. The documentary developed from festival co-founders Steve Byrne and Kathy Kieliszewskis' interest in capturing the historical moment of the summer of 1967 half a century later, and combines an oral history of the events leading up to and after the rebellion with the perspectives of residents living in Detroit at the time, as depicted through their home movies. Byrne and Kieliszewski helped DIA solicit this home footage and managed the cataloging and digitization of the 700 reels sent in by residents. "It has been an unusually big success for us," Byrne said of the film, which had been viewed by about 9,000 people in Detroit as of the site visit, "and DIA was a huge part of this project coming together."

In addition to *12th and Clairmount*, the museum commemorated the anniversary of the 1967 rebellion with an exhibition entitled *Art of Rebellion* (2017). *Art of Rebellion* invites viewers to reflect on the social and political issues and shared history and culture of the African American community as captured by African American artists and activists who produced work individually and in collectives during the Civil Rights Movement up to the present day.⁷⁷ The exhibition, curated by department head of the General Motors Center for African American Art Valerie Mercer, not only portrays historical discrimination and endemic violence perpetrated against African Americans, but also pride in the community's identity and accomplishments. DIA collaborated on this project with The Charles H. Wright museum of African American History, which organized its own exhibition: *Say It Loud: Art, History, Rebellion* (2017). Both

⁷⁷ "Art of Rebellion: Black Art of the Civil Rights Movement," Detroit Institute of Arts, accessed December 7, 2017, <https://www.dia.org/art/exhibitions/art-rebellion-black-art-civil-rights-movement>.

exhibitions complemented each other and were part of a unified effort. It was the first time that DIA partnered with the Wright Museum. Now, both institutions are developing a three-to-five year strategic plan to continue working together.

Evaluation

Morris's evaluation team conducted a visitor engagement survey during an eight-day period for *Art of Rebellion* and collected responses from 513 visitors of the 50,692 who attended. More than a third of respondents had never visited the museum before, with almost as many saying that the exhibition and its content influenced their decision to visit. The survey allowed the museum to measure visitors' reactions to the exhibition, and track demographic variables, helping them measure how certain exhibitions connect with various communities. For instance, after Morris's team analyzed and coded free text responses asking respondents if anything had a strong positive or negative effect on their visit, the plurality (17 percent) of the 308 recorded comments described the exhibition as being "thought provoking and emotional." Respondents were 40 percent male, 60 percent female, with 72 percent holding a college or graduate degree. Eighty-four percent visited in a group (the average size: 2.8). Respondents were 72 percent white/European, 16 percent African American, 7 percent Hispanic/Latino.

Art of Rebellion was also evaluated in relation to a group of other exhibitions, yielding some interesting results that could help guide the museum's thinking as it works toward a goal to have its audience reflect the demographics of the tri-county area. For instance, comparisons show that audience demographics differ substantially by exhibition. *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus* (2012) attracted an audience that was 89 percent white and 5 percent African American, while *30 Americans* (2009) drew an audience that was 51 percent white and 41 percent African American. While the nine exhibitions in the comparison group drew crowds with average ages

spanning 45 to 54, *Art of Rebellion* attracted a younger crowd, with an average age of 41. *Art of Rebellion* attracted significantly fewer museum members than the nine comparison exhibitions; twelve percent of the exhibition's audience were members, whereas the comparison group ranged from 27 percent to 43 percent. And *Art of Rebellion* drew the lowest number of Michigan residents. While 25 percent of visitors to *30 Americans* were from Detroit, only 10 percent of visitors to *Art of Rebellion* were from the city.

During a Reflecting Our Community committee meeting, members discussed expanding the visitor engagement survey to include *D-Cyphered* (2017), a recent photography exhibition that showcases Detroit's hip-hop scene. The committee expressed interest in conducting a visitor survey for the exhibition, in part to build a deeper understanding of the ways the museum's exhibition program affects the demographics of the audience. *D-Cyphered* consists of 75 portraits of Detroit hip-hop artists, the majority of them African American, that were shot by Detroit native Jenny Risher between 2015 and 2017.

Morris described how even in the early stages of planning an exhibition, the visitor has to be taken into consideration: "Is it something that's going to resonate with them? Is it something that's going to fit their needs? What are their needs?" Evaluations are most easily collected through exit surveys and response boxes that have been scattered throughout various galleries, but this method doesn't collect feedback from people who do not come to the museum in the first place. "If we're trying to reach local stakeholders, sometimes those people aren't coming to the museum so we have to go where they are," Morris explained. He listed other outreach methods such as web surveys, social media sites, and personal networks that are used to connect to targeted communities. Although he expressed that limited capacity and resources can affect the amount of outreach DIA is able to do, the continued use of evaluation and the willingness to

engage directly with underrepresented communities demonstrates another way that the museum is working to diversify its audience.

At DIA, some personnel challenges have made it difficult for the museum to move forward in diversifying its staff, and in building collaboration between departments. But new leadership is working to break down those barriers. With a commitment to transforming into a visitor oriented institution, as is evidenced by the deliberate evaluation efforts the museum has made. For a large institution that has recently undergone a significant leadership change and has only recently established a degree of financial stability, it will take time to see these efforts bear fruit.

Staff Diversity: First and Third Floor

In 2015, the *Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey* found that of the 181 participating museums, 72 percent of overall staff identified as white non-Hispanic, while 28 percent identified as people of color. Among staff working as curators, conservators, educators, and senior administrators—those job types categorized as “intellectual leadership”—these proportions were even more homogenous, with 84 percent identifying as white non-Hispanic, 6 percent as Asian, 4 percent as black or African American, and 3 percent as two or more races.⁷⁸ By comparison, DIA has achieved relatively more racial and ethnic diversity than the broader field, as can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.

When considering representational diversity in relation to the museum’s environment, a host of complexities emerge. As shown in Figure 2, DIA’s staff is 53 percent white non-

⁷⁸ Roger Schonfeld, Mariet Westermann, and Liam Sweeney, “The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey,” July 28, 2015, accessed December 5, 2017, https://mellon.org/media/filer_public/ba/99/ba99e53a-48d5-4038-80e1-66f9ba1c020e/awmf_museum_diversity_report_aamd_7-28-15.pdf.

Hispanic, 39 percent black or African American, with 9 percent comprising Asian and Hispanic employees and employees identifying as two or more races. Among its intellectual leadership, these underrepresented groups are also employed at a higher rate than in the broader field, as seen in Figure 3, with 71 percent white non-Hispanic staff, 15 percent black or African American, and 14 percent Asian, Hispanic, and two or more races.

Figure 6: DIA All Staff Race/Ethnicity

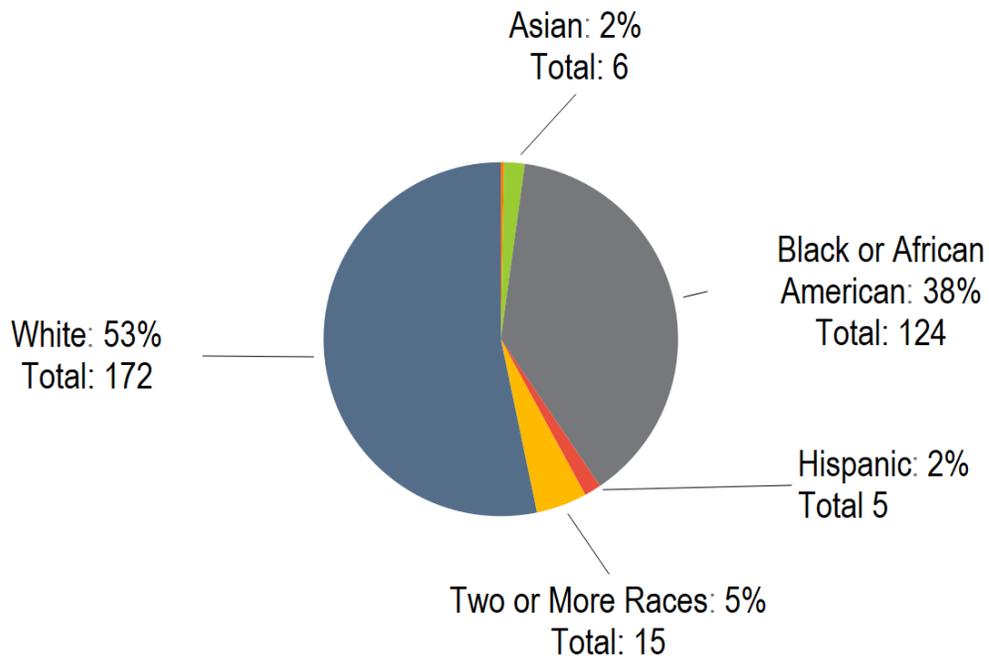
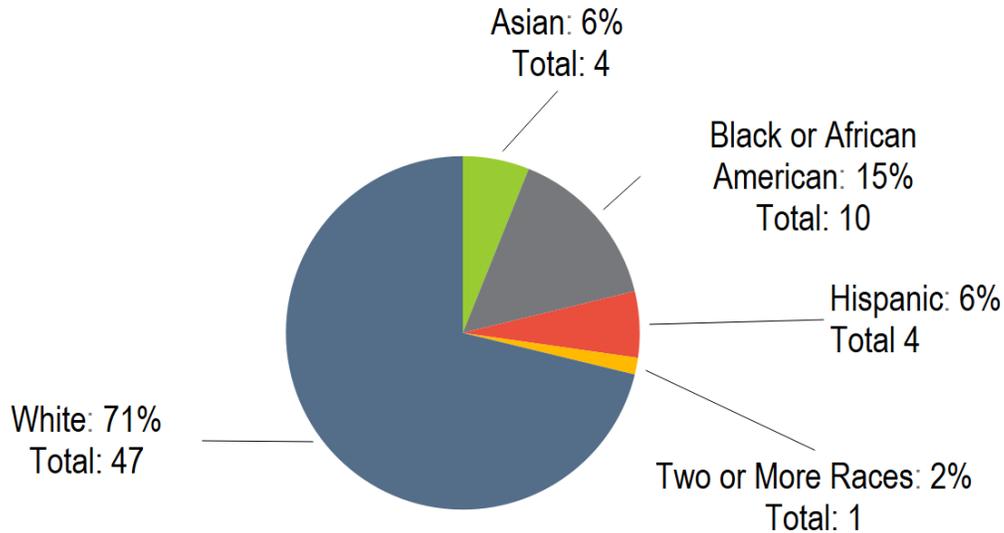


Figure 7: DIA: Education, Curatorial, Conservation, Museum Leadership

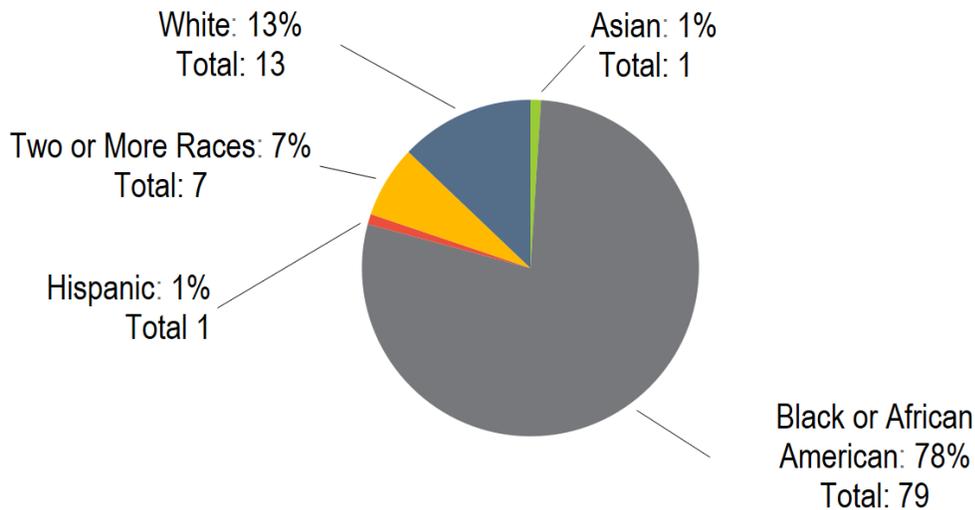


Despite its relatively higher levels of diversity compared to the national averages, some staff at the museum expressed surprise that DIA had been selected to participate in the museum case studies for its diversity. As some interviewees pointed out, the museum is far from representing the demographics of the city of Detroit, which was 83 percent black or African American in the 2010 census. Rather, DIA more closely mirrors the demographics of Oakland, Macomb, and Wayne Counties—the tri-county area that funds the millage—and which are, respectively, 14 percent, 12 percent, and 39 percent black or African American.⁷⁹ But relative to the city of Detroit, which is a part of Wayne County, African Americans remain underrepresented in overall staff and in intellectual leadership positions. The city’s demographics are more closely

⁷⁹ “Quick Facts: Michigan,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/map/MI/RHI225216#viewtop>.

represented in front-line positions, such as security, facilities, and the museum store (see Figure 4).

Figure 8: DIA Security, Facilities, and Store Demographics



While DIA may be more diverse than other American art museums, there is still a substantial gap in its representation between the front-line staff who work on the first floor and who are majority black, and the leadership staff who have their offices on the third floor and who are majority white.⁸⁰ As one employee explained, “There’s a great divide between the third floor and the first floor. We feel that we are not heard up here. They don’t come down to the front, they don’t listen, they don’t see how operations are run. This is the consensus of people working on the first floor—it seems like the ivory tower is making decisions for us.” However, this interviewee

⁸⁰ Departments other than the four included in intellectual leadership, such as marketing and development, also have their offices on the third floor.

described that the culture at DIA is changing under the museum's current administration, which is working to bridge the gaps between these parts of the museum.

DIA is a stark example of how staff demographics can effect community relations. By having very few people of color in education and curatorial roles, it becomes a challenge to develop authentic engagement. In one interview, an African American curator of contemporary art who is a native of Detroit, and who has since left the museum, described the unusual situation in which education staff, in an effort to make works more accessible, were actually diluting messages that the curator suspected would be well received from the audiences she knew well. In another case, an African American curator who has worked at the museum for decades described the care with which racial issues must be addressed for white audiences. She described her as approaching racial art by extending an invitation that, because this was American history, it was also the history of white people. This approach makes sense for a museum with 90 percent white audience, but not for a museum that is in a city that is 83 percent African American.

DIA is working hard to diversify staff under the leadership of Salort-Pons, and the vision is clearly aligned with an interest in deepening the museum's connection to the public and its civic value. Salort-Pons describes his goal as to turn DIA into a "Public Square" for Detroit, which he hopes will stimulate interactions in the city that otherwise are segregated. This involves working with external partners, understanding the museum's audience, and diversifying staff.

Conclusion

Who is the museum for? Many publicly oriented institutions will make the claim, both obvious and provocative, that they are for everyone. It's obvious because to exclude anyone from access to cultural resources that are housed in public institutions is to embrace undemocratic values that are exclusionary based on arbitrary characteristics. It's provocative because

collections based institutions historically have served only the affluent, well educated, and often white audiences.

How, then, does a museum take seriously the call to serve everyone? To begin this ambitious project, the museum might consider the matrix that framed the research for these case studies. Serving everyone means serving diverse populations, it means including perspectives beyond that of the structurally privileged group, and it means generating equity within the museum's operations. These values can intersect with the museum's approach to audience, staff, collections, and governance in a way that transforms the institution into a truly public space.

For instance, when Brooklyn Museum instituted First Saturday, they succeeded in diversifying their audience and creating an inclusive atmosphere in the museum with respect to collections and program. When LACMA's education department focuses on creating pathways into the field for the disenfranchised they are both improving equity in the curatorial field and diversifying staff. When the DIA uses evaluation to better understand how its audience is interacting with exhibitions, it manages to both understand when they are successful at reaching new populations, and also introduce the museum to the public by conducting research outside the walls of the museum.

These changes are important because, as many museum leaders have found, invitations are not enough to make the museum a welcoming place. Partnerships must be formed, and inroads made to various communities before people who had never before stepped foot in a museum feel comfortable doing so.

Starting this work can be daunting. Further research toward this end can explore the idea of institutional fluencies. In many of the cases illustrated in this thesis, the ability to draw partnerships and connections outside the museum walls, with historically disenfranchised

publics, comes from a champion within the museum who took it upon themselves to expand their job position in order to do that work. This is effective for obvious reasons, institutions are ultimately made up of people, and people have learned how and when to respond to gestures made by other people. Good manners can develop an acquaintance. An authentic gesture can compel a friendship. And everyone has someone in their lives who only calls for a favor. Tokenistic gestures are transparent. If an institution wants to connect with an underserved public, what are the mechanisms for doing so? Typically, a museum might hire a diversity officer, form a committee, or keep an eye out for an upcoming exhibition that relates to their specific ethnicity in some way. It is common for these efforts to center in the marketing/communications department, which has the project of megaphoning the museum's message.

It is less common for the museum to begin with self-reflection. Especially for large museums with hundreds of employees, it can be a managerial challenge to understand the degree of coherence in the museum's organizational culture and the potential assets the museum may have when trying to reach a variety of constituents. But staff who have authentic connections to communities that the museum is attempting to build a relationship with are able to more effectively build trust on behalf of the institution. I call these authentic connections "fluencies" because of they afford the ability to communicate with the public in a way that feels genuine.

More nuanced than demographics or job descriptions, these fluencies can help organizations avoid the damaging effects of tokenism when presenting itself to communities it has historically ignored. And they can be present in unexpected places. While education departments are often more diverse than the rest of the museum as a result of their need to connect to museum constituents, in the case of DIA it is possible that a higher degree of fluency existed for a time in the curatorial department, which had a level of representation from the city

of Detroit that was not present in the education department. Therefore, it is not prudent to assume that the education department is by default the best solution to building these partnerships. The museum must first develop a holistic understanding of their staff, which publics they are able to navigate, and how their roles at the organization might be augmented to take advantage of these skills.

The Tate has implemented something resembling this framework, which they've called Staff Advisory Networks. They are voluntary networks that developed out of support groups for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) network, LGBTQ+, parents and caretakers, and the disability working group. Tate staff members are allowed 4 hours per month to participate, and signage for these groups is very visible throughout staff areas. Each group meets 4 times per year and is sponsored by a gallery director. These groups have developed into defacto internal consultants for the museum, addressing concerns about culturally sensitive issues before material is made public.⁸¹

Instruments for evaluating and organizing similar groups in the U.S. would be helpful in taking an important first step of recognizing existing institutional fluencies, as well as important gaps that need to be addressed. More broadly, more research is needed to understand the ways in which museums and art organizations influence the public both in a collective and individual sense. Sara Konrath's research with the Minneapolis Institute of Art's Center for Empathy Studies is a fascinating step towards a better understanding of the impact art can have on the human psyche.⁸² But social scientists struggle to understand the positive externalities of cultural

⁸¹ Tate, "Diversity and Inclusion," Tate, accessed January 10, 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/working-at-tate/diversity-inclusion>.

⁸² "Center for Empathy & the Visual Arts," Once at Mia: A Mummy and Her Secrets — Minneapolis Institute of Art, accessed January 10, 2019, <https://new.artsmia.org/empathy>.

institutions, perhaps because of how difficult they are to quantify. Perhaps future studies could use quantitative social data to generate criteria for interpretive research that grants more depth to some of the work referenced in this thesis supporting the claim that cultural organizations can be drivers of civic engagement and even manage to bridge some of the incredible differences that have come to define public discourse in the 21st century.

These three encyclopedic museums reflect some of the broader challenges and opportunities that face the museum field as arts administrators work towards a goal of realizing a mission of civic engagement while maintaining curatorial rigor. They reveal ways in which the museum strives to realize the values of equity, diversity and inclusion in ways that are authentic to their history and environment. By creating pathways into the field, leveraging public programming, relying on research and evaluation to understand audiences, and remaining responsive to controversies, these museums have shared their processes so that others can learn how to experiment at their own institutions.

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