

A photograph of a modern architectural space. The foreground shows a floor covered in small, smooth pebbles in shades of yellow, green, and blue. A dark metal railing runs along the edge of a glass-enclosed walkway. Through the glass, several people are walking. The ceiling is a flat, light-colored concrete slab with recessed circular lights. The background shows a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall aesthetic is clean, minimalist, and open.

**WHAT WE  
MAY BE  
ART MUSEUMS  
AND THE  
IMPLICATIONS  
OF SPECIAL  
PROGRAMS**

**THE  
CLARK**

**WHAT WE  
MAY BE**

**ART MUSEUMS  
AND THE  
IMPLICATIONS  
OF SPECIAL  
PROGRAMS**

This publication was conceived by the education department at the Clark Art Institute. A related colloquium, titled *What We May Be: Art Museums and the Implications of Special Programs*, was held May 17–20, 2017, at the Clark. For information on programs and publications at the Clark, visit [www.clarkart.edu](http://www.clarkart.edu).

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# FOREWORD

In fall 2015 Ronna Tulgan Ostheimer, the Clark's director of education, proposed hosting a series of colloquia, titled *What We May Be*, to explore the changing nature of the museum education profession with colleagues in the field. It seemed a fitting gathering given the dual mission of the Clark. At the intersection of exploratory research and thoughtful museum practice, these two areas of interest demonstrate our institution's determination to advance an understanding of art by engaging people with our permanent collections and rotating exhibitions, as well as through scholarly investigations in art history and visual studies. The goal of the *What We May Be* series is to delve deeply and critically into emerging directions and issues in museum education, particularly those that challenge traditional practices and compel the profession to develop a new sense of identity.

This first colloquium's focus on how art museums across the country are extending themselves beyond the confines of historically typical audiences to engage with specific constituencies was a prescient topic. Here in the Berkshires, as in the major cities represented in this publication, we are concerned with the ethic of inclusion and diversity, and fostering relevant experiences with art for all people. We hope the examples of targeted outreach efforts that these educators model will inspire readers to think broadly about what it means to involve special groups with local cultural institutions, particularly those that may have felt excluded in the past. Furthermore, the colloquium went beyond a showcase of specialized programs to probe the implications of targeted outreach and

ask: How does this type of focused approach influence best practices with different audiences, the role of educators within museums, and even the role of a museum within its community?

The Clark sees itself as a greenhouse of ideas. As with the rest of the institution's departments, the education department seeks to innovate in its pursuit of a community of respect and support. In this spirit, the Clark hopes to see the *What We May Be* colloquium and publication series generate a rich future of collaboration as it continues to spotlight educators challenging and energizing museums from the inside out.

The essays in this volume reflect systems of support within the authors' respective institutions, as the educators shape not only the programs they are responsible for but the larger presence of museums in their communities. In addition to thanking Ronna for all of her efforts as the leader of the Clark's education initiatives, I would also like to acknowledge the commitment to excellence demonstrated by Clark educators Amanda Bell Goldmakher, Hanna Leatherman, and Chelsea Neveu; the dedicated docents who serve the Clark and its communities; and our colleagues from around the country who contributed to this project.

Olivier Meslay  
Hardymon Director, Clark Art Institute

**WHAT WE  
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MUSEUMS  
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## RONNA TULGAN OSTHEIMER

Director of Education, Clark Art Institute

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Over the past ten years, many art museums have taken action to be “more relevant to more people,” as Nina Simon advises, in order to make museum work meaningful, powerful, and accessible to diverse communities.<sup>1</sup> Museum educators are often responsible for this effort within their institutions, designing programming for new audiences and actively considering how to serve groups that may not have visited in the past, as well as individuals who may be marginalized from mainstream society.

The practice and thinking around developing outreach programs for targeted audiences both reflects and shapes the field of museum education, dictating changes in programming and in the roles of educators. Who gets to decide which audiences to focus on? How do we adapt our practices to meet the needs of new audiences? What does all this mean to our profession and to the museums where we work?

Nine museum educators who are responsible for targeted outreach programs or are in positions to set policy about programming for particular

groups convened for three days in May 2017 to consider these types of questions. The intent of the colloquium, *What We May Be: Art Museums and the Implications of Special Programs*, was not to serve as a forum for show-and-tell about various innovative programs, but instead to provide time to reflect critically on our practices and how programming for specialized audiences may change the definition of what it means to be a museum educator.

All the colloquium participants are passionate about their work and aware of how the field of museum education is changing. Each contributed an essay to this publication reflecting on different possibilities for how museums can be relevant to new audiences and what these programs may mean to our profession.

“Who Does Inclusion Exclude?: Disability and the Limitations of Models of Inclusion,” by Rebecca McGinnis, senior managing educator, accessibility, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, shares the Met’s history of programming for people who are blind or partially sighted and

**FIG. 1**

Museum Building,  
Clark Art Institute



considers the more recent focus on the goal and ethic of inclusion rather than access.

Emily Wiskera, manager of access programs, Dallas Museum of Art, discusses her experience developing a program for children who are on the autism spectrum and their families in “Museum as Sensory and Social Space: Autism Programming at the Dallas Museum of Art.” Wiskera describes the unique needs of this group and the very specialized practices designed to make the museum experience valuable and meaningful for this particular audience, as well as how the experience has helped her understand the concepts of equity and mission in new ways.

Veronica Alvarez, director of school and teacher programs, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), contributed the essay “Museums and English Learners: Inclusion versus Exclusion.” Alvarez focuses on how art museums are ideal environments for K–12 student English Learners and details the practices museums can adopt to support this kind of learning, including partnerships with

schools and classroom teachers. Furthermore, she considers the fact that due to changing national demographics, this type of work is mandatory for museums if they want to stay relevant to their communities.

In “Taking It to the Streets: Engaging Our Neighborhood,” Karleen Gardner, director of learning innovation, Minneapolis Institute of Arts (Mia), writes about programs designed to engage Mia’s neighbors as a first step to building relationships and providing meaningful programming. Gardner describes a number of collaborative mural projects and how they provided a bridge between the museum and its neighbors, resulting in increased participation from people who live right around the museum but were not actually visiting.

Laurel Humble, associate educator, community, access, and school programs, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, describes the growth of the Meet Me at MoMA program into a more general focus on engaging with the elderly in her

essay “Evolution of a Focus on the Elderly.” Humble discusses why MoMA chooses to prioritize this audience and some of the issues this has brought up, and she describes the museum’s broader initiative for older adults, Prime Time.

Lindsay Catherine Harris, teen programs manager, Brooklyn Museum, considers how art museums, as places that explore human expression, are not only in an ideal position to provide safe spaces for people who may feel marginalized in mainstream society but may even have a responsibility to do so. “Creating Space by and for LGBTQ+ Youth of Color” discusses how the Brooklyn Museum has prioritized this initiative, focusing on how the LGBTQ Teen Night Planning Committee exemplifies this work.

In “Art, Experience, and Community: Learning and Engagement at the Saint Louis Art Museum before and after Ferguson,” Amanda Thompson Rundahl, director of learning and engagement, Saint Louis Art Museum, shares the historical racial makeup of the greater St. Louis area as a context to understand work the museum does, specifically in the aftermath of the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson in 2014. The tragic event spurred conversations at the museum about whether or not staff should develop special programming in response.

Twyla Kitts, teacher programs educator, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), Richmond, writes about how the museum can address issues of social justice through teaching about art in “What Museums May Be: Crucibles for Reflection, Empathy, and Optimism,” and how this approach can help the museum be meaningful to different people in new ways. Kitts focuses on how museum education can help visitors consider what it means to be a citizen of the world.

As director of education for the Clark Art Institute (fig. 1), I share my experience developing a program for a very specialized

**Maybe the answer to the question, What are the implications of special programs at art museums?, is that museum educators, by designing such programs, are also becoming agents of change.**

audience, adjudicated youth sentenced to participate in the program Responding to Art Involves Self Expression (RAISE). In “The RAISE Program at the Clark: Engaging with Humanity at an Art Museum,” I discuss how developing a program for this new and atypical audience stretches the boundaries of museum education practice and how this helped the Clark redefine its approach to programming.

It has been an honor to host the first of the Clark’s What We May Be colloquia and to serve as one of the editors of this important publication. This series of essays provides insights into the evolving field of museum education and the kind of thinking that is involved in educators’ day-to-day work. Together, the essays reflect a fierce dedication to the practice, a sense of the importance of and potential in the field, and how changes in museum education are indicative of changes happening in museums at large. I applaud my colleagues in the field for the integrity, creativity, personal commitment, and resilience that they bring to our work, elevating its importance for all. Maybe the answer to the question, What are the implications of special programs at art museums?, is that museum educators, by designing such programs, are also becoming agents of change. ■

1 Nina Simon, *The Art of Relevance* (Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2016).

**WHO DOES  
INCLUSION  
EXCLUDE?  
DISABILITY  
AND THE  
LIMITATIONS  
OF MODELS OF  
INCLUSION**

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## REBECCA MCGINNIS

Senior Managing Educator, Accessibility, Metropolitan Museum of Art

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The museum education colloquium at the Clark Art Institute that sparked this publication explored the ever-changing relationship between museums and communities, and the role of museum educators in fostering these complex connections. Many initiatives engaging marginalized communities, represented at this meeting through case studies, attempt to address longstanding social injustices. This has been achieved by creating spaces for open dialogue and new experiences, with carefully considered attention to particular contexts.

At the colloquium, I presented a case study of the programs, services, and other initiatives at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, that work to include people who are blind

or partially sighted in various ways. These include *Picture This!*, a monthly program that makes the museum and its collection and exhibitions more accessible through description, touch, and other multisensory activities; *Seeing Through Drawing*, a drawing class designed for people with various levels of vision; touch tours and descriptive tours by request; and staff and teaching artists who are blind or partially sighted. This essay reflects the theoretical underpinnings of my remarks. It is informed by my work over the past twenty-five years and my experience as a disabled museum professional, and it was enriched by the colloquium and subsequent discussions with members of the access team at the Met.

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A note to the reader on disability terminology: I have used both people-first and identity-first language in this essay. The intention of people-first language is to acknowledge and emphasize the individual, rather than overemphasizing disability or even reducing the person to their disability, e.g. “the blind” or “blind people.” Although people-first language remains standard and widespread, especially in the realm of customer service, identity-first terminology is increasingly popular among disabled people. While people-first language ensures reference to the person, it also locates the disability within the person, e.g. “person *with* a disability,” without acknowledging external disabling factors. On the other hand, identity-first language, e.g. “disabled person” suggests that the person may be disabled *by* something, the environment, for example, or the attitudes of others, placing the disability outside the person (as distinct from an individual characteristic or impairment). As a museum accessibility professional, I use people-first terminology and train others to start with this type of language. However, as a disabled person, I prefer identity-first language, which to me better reflects a social model of disability.

### Who Does “Inclusion” Include?

Discussions focusing on diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice currently abound in the museum field, as museums reconsider their role in their communities and in society. A sampling of themes of a few key museum and museum education conferences in 2017 reflects this timely preoccupation: Gateways for Understanding: Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion in Museums (American Alliance of Museums); Inclusivity: From Within and Beyond (New York City Museum Educators Roundtable); and Diversity & Inclusion: Art Museum Educators as Levers of Change (Museum Education Division Preconference day, National Art Education Association [NAEA]).

But what is meant by “diversity” and “inclusion” in the museum context? How do museums understand and apply these terms? Do they refer to audiences, staff, or both? Does the museum education field share the perspective of the museum field at large? And (where) does disability fit in?

Discussions of diversity rarely include issues of disability. Diversity narratives frequently detail the communities included, but more often than not, reference to disability is absent from this delineation, despite the unequivocal history of systemic discrimination against this group. The 2016 Deloitte report “The Radical Transformation of Diversity and Inclusion” exemplifies this by focusing on diversity among “individuals of different genders, races, ethnicities, religions, and sexual orientations.” Despite increasing interest from museum educators, if not museum leadership, in accessibility for visitors with disabilities, or at least in complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), debates on diversity in museums are no exception. For example, while the description of the NAEA’s Diversity & Inclusion program began with a nod to “think[ing] deeply about all of our various identities and social relationships,” the rest of the narrative focused exclusively on race

and museums. It called on museum educators “to examine how race influences our work in museum education.” This call is, of course, timely and of the utmost importance. However, I would argue that while race is certainly one aspect of diversity, it should not be used as synonymous and interchangeable with diversity, equity, and inclusion, as it is in the NAEA description. Ultimately, the stated theme of the NAEA preconference program was race and museums, not diversity and museums.

While the diversity conversation in museums applies most often to audiences, there has been some attention to issues of staff diversity. In 2015 the American Association of Museum Directors (AAMD) and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation commissioned a study collecting demographic data on US art museum staff. This project grew from an initiative to diversify the museum profession by supporting curatorial fellowships for “students from historically underrepresented minorities and other undergraduates who are committed to diversifying our cultural organizations.”<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the “relative underrepresentation of people of color on art museum staff and the preponderance of men in museum leadership positions” and the lack of data quantifying this acknowledged iniquity in the profession, this information-gathering initiative sought to present a snapshot of diversity among US art museum staff.<sup>2</sup> While the survey is referred to as the “Art Museum Diversity Survey” on the AAMD website, it addresses only race/ethnicity and gender, and touches slightly on age, missing the opportunity to explore the presence or absence of other underrepresented groups in the museum profession and thereby perpetuating the invisibility of these groups, including those with disabilities.

While there is an acknowledged dearth of information about race, ethnicity, and gender in the museum profession, there is a complete absence of data about disability.

Following the AAMD survey, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) carried out a similar survey of New York cultural institutions. The 2016 report, “Diversity in the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Community,” again focuses on race and ethnicity, gender, and age. The report explains that while the survey included a field for disability status, collecting data on disability is inherently difficult since organizations do not always record this type of information about staff. It goes on to say that they “were nonetheless surprised to receive nearly no records of anyone with a disability out of the 48,280 employees, volunteers and board members who were recorded.”<sup>3</sup> This finding concurs with another recent report, “Discovering Disability: Data & NYC Dance,” from Dance NYC. This report states, “Better and more uniform data on programs, education and facilities, and, critically, demographic data to illuminate the role of disabled people in the workforce and in the audience, are requisite to advancing an inclusion and equity agenda.”<sup>4</sup>

The DCLA survey also revealed a disheartening lack of awareness or interest in disability. When asked to check the boxes indicating what kinds of diversity are important to improving the quality of work at their organization, only 63 percent included disability, 27 percentage points below ethnicity (90 percent said this was important) and well below other groups (e.g., 88 percent included race; 86 percent, age; 85 percent, gender; 80 percent, socioeconomic; and 71 percent, LGBTQ).

Furthermore, the representative example of “best practices concerning disability” cited on the second-to-last page of the DCLA report from organizations “striving towards inclusion and equity for the disabled community” exposes an incomplete understanding of what diversity and inclusion mean with regard to disability: “[Our] website uses a responsive template

design optimized for multiple screen sizes and screen readers to ensure accessibility by people with visual impairments. We also provide transcripts of all broadcast content to ensure accessibility by people with hearing impairments.”<sup>5</sup> While access to information in multiple formats is an essential step, accessibility is but a prerequisite to inclusion and does not fully address systemic exclusion. The physical possibility to participate is not the same as equitable participation. Yet where disability is addressed under the aegis of diversity, this focus on accessibility is the norm. Offering an example of basic accessibility also perpetuates a deficit model of disability, in which disability is only accommodated. (Interestingly, during the colloquium discussion, Veronica Alvarez from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art noted that this emphasis on overcoming deficit was also regularly applied to English Learners in museums.) And tellingly, the fact that the example of diversity/accessibility relates more to audiences, despite being part of a survey about museum staff, reflects another preconception about disability/accessibility—that the concept is only relevant with regard to the people we decide to let in, and is not relevant to those who make up the museum staff.

Perhaps this misalignment results from the fact that, while considerations of disability and diversity intersect, the spectrum of requirements creating equity for disabled people does not fit entirely into common approaches to diversity and inclusion. Physically accessible gallery spaces and information in multiple formats, for example, are a first step, a precondition to museums’ confrontation of the long history of systemic discrimination against disabled people, but accessibility should not be confused with inclusion, nor with any claim of diversity. In order to make these claims in reference to disability, museums must also acknowledge disability as a valid aspect of human experience and identity and as a socially

constructed condition, and in turn be willing to reflect this history and experience in their collections, interpretation, policies, and programs.

### **How Are Museums Addressing Disability?**

Museums conceive their responses to disability almost exclusively in terms of accessibility, with much less emphasis on broader questions of diversity and inclusion or recognition of pervasive discriminatory practices. Accessibility is, of course, an important and necessary goal for cultural institutions. However, the responsibility for accessibility for disabled visitors in museums usually lies with education departments, with less priority given to creating an accessible museum environment. There are several reasons for the tendency toward education-driven accessibility in museums.

Firstly, the dominant model is that of classroom education. Working with schools is traditionally a central component of museum education, and pedagogical approaches developed in museums often respond to classroom models. Museum education has been influenced by the definition and evolution of inclusion in public education. And while on paper this definition might closely resemble the way inclusion is understood when coupled with diversity, in practice, classroom inclusion focuses more on adaptation, integration, and accommodation than on identity, equity, and dismantling institutionalized oppression. For example, large-print textbooks might make it possible for a partially sighted student to read with the class, but help navigating the perceived stigma of oversize, multivolume books may not be given consideration. Museum education has followed suit to a large degree.

Secondly, museums often use education programming as a primary way to make their collections and exhibitions accessible to visitors with disabilities. Indeed, programming can be an effective way to

create equitable environments for learning and engagement. But programming should not be used as an excuse to perpetuate inherently discriminatory practices in exhibition and information design, such as small label texts or objects displayed in high cases, for example, that systematically exclude visitors with disabilities.

Additionally, and too often, museum programming claims to be inclusive because “everyone is welcome to participate.” Declaring inclusiveness does not itself make participation by people with disabilities possible. Well-meaning attempts to adapt activities that are conceived for nondisabled audiences frequently miss the mark, simultaneously demanding assimilation while inadvertently highlighting difference and even inability.

For example, an activity in which children draw animals or people on split pages and then mix and match the tops and bottoms to form new, nonsensical creatures may be made possible for a blind child to do using adaptive tools such as a tactile drawing board, touch, and description. However, this activity relies heavily on manipulating visual information and easily understanding the resulting combinations. The humor is likely to be lost in the cumbersome and time-consuming process of translating the visual into verbal descriptions. While the activity might be considered accessible with these adaptations, it wouldn’t necessarily be equally fun and engaging, and could even be frustrating and boring. An activity exploring tactile qualities could be more inclusive. For example, educators might invite children to investigate objects of different materials through touch and then create a collage from differently textured papers, combining or mixing them up in new ways. Since this activity doesn’t privilege the visual, anyone can participate, irrespective of visual ability. A truly inclusive approach to developing “inclusive” programs entails designing various experiences from the

outset that are achievable, understandable, and enjoyable for people with different abilities and disabilities.

Thirdly, existing conceptions of community outreach and social justice can limit the effectiveness of museums in connecting with disabled people. More than ever, museums are looking at their role and impact in their communities from a holistic perspective. While definitions of “community” are perhaps even more varied and amorphous than definitions of “inclusion,” connecting with communities has always been central to the work of the museum educator. Communities are often defined by ethnicity or geographical location, sometimes by religion or even age. Programming for audiences with disabilities is often grouped with community engagement efforts. However, museums sometimes struggle to recognize disabled people as a community group that cuts across all distinctions of race and ethnicity, class and cultural affiliation.

A fourth problematic issue is the hierarchy within museums. Despite legal obligations and a growing interest in issues of diversity, accessibility is rarely considered a high institutional priority. The relatively low status of educators in museums, and the tendency to give responsibility for programming for people with disabilities to junior staff, perpetuates the notion that accessibility is unimportant and prevents the development of expertise in individual museums and in the field generally.

Of course, many museums do consider accessibility for disabled visitors—and maybe even staff and volunteers—in ways that extend beyond education and programming. Here, in building projects, exhibition design, and websites, for example, minimum requirements for legal compliance can easily be misconstrued as good practice, accessibility, or even inclusion. Without the depth of knowledge about what accessibility

really means and the perspective of true inclusion, accessibility can easily be reduced to an optional extra, icing on the cake, and the first thing to go when budgets are tight. Good customer care can go a long way toward creating a welcoming environment, even when some barriers prevail. However, “I’m sorry for the inconvenience,” which is commonly uttered to those waiting for wheelchairs or unable to read labels, is not an acceptable response to a disabled visitor or to a disabled staff member.

### **Inclusion or Assimilation?**

At the Clark colloquium, Lindsay Catherine Harris (pp. 60–71) presented the Brooklyn Museum’s InterseXtions program for LGBTQ teens. Among other activities examining gender and sexuality in the museum, there is a teen committee that plans the museum’s LGBTQ youth night. While the event is open to all, the planning committee offers an LGBTQ-specific space. I was struck by a comment Harris shared: she noted how much committee participants appreciate having an LGBTQ-*specific* program, as distinct from an LGBTQ-*friendly* program. She described how the teens experience isolation and a lack of community. This made sense to me. The teens live most of their lives in an integrated environment, an “inclusive” environment, you could say. Who could object to creating a space for them to explore their identities, to be in the majority, to have a safe space?

Over the years, I have often had to justify programming tailored for visitors with specific disabilities—touch tours for blind and partially sighted people and family programs for children and adults with developmental disabilities and autism, for example. I’ve been asked, again and again, “Why not just make all programs inclusive so everyone can participate in any program?” The idea of “inclusion” seems an easy way out—a low-budget fix proposed by privileged museum professionals who don’t understand what it means to really be treated inequitably.

## “We must create an environment where no one is advantaged or disadvantaged and . . . where ‘we’ is everyone.”

Attempts to be inclusive can result in something closer to assimilation, leading to a loss of identity or even producing a sense of self-illegitimacy.

Participants in the audience-specific programs I oversee, such as *Picture This!* and *Seeing Through Drawing* (for people who are blind or partially sighted) and *Discoveries* (for children and adults with developmental disabilities and autism, now in its thirtieth year), often express that they feel included, both in the museum and in the strong community that forms among program participants, and that they do not feel segregated or isolated by these programs. They feel that their needs are taken seriously and that they can experience art and express themselves in a variety of ways. And this belonging extends beyond the program: for example, two former participants in *Seeing Through Drawing* have now joined the team of teaching artists who lead the class each month. Like the LGBTQ teens, these Met visitors with disabilities live most of their lives in so-called inclusive settings, and these programs offer them the opportunity *not* to have to be different, *not* to have to explain what they need, *not* to be concerned about the assumptions of other people. In both cases, these spaces recognize and respect different identities, not as flavors enhancing a melting pot, but as deserving of distinct expression.

Of course, I am not suggesting that disability-specific programs should be the only way, or even the main way, for museums to engage and include people with disabilities. A multifaceted approach that permeates the entire institution is required, from

programming, architectural and exhibition design, and interpretation, to digital resources, marketing, and staff recruitment and retention. And most importantly, a deep and thorough understanding and full commitment to equity is necessary. Without investment in equality of opportunity for disabled people from the highest levels of leadership and throughout the organization, museums will be perpetuating an elitist culture of “us and them” that denies disabled people participation and agency. The founder of the American Institute for Managing Diversity, R. Roosevelt Thomas Jr., summed up the scope of work required, albeit without reference to disability, “so long as racial and gender equality is something we grant to minorities and women, then there will be no racial and gender equality. . . . We must create an environment where no one is advantaged or disadvantaged and . . . where ‘we’ is everyone.”<sup>6</sup> I hope that museums are prepared to effect such significant change. ■

1 Roger Schonfeld and Mariët Westermann, “The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey Report,” The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the American Association of Museum Directors, July 28, 2015, [https://mellon.org/media/filer\\_public/ba/99/ba99e53a-48d5-4038-80e1-66f9ba1c020e/awmf\\_museum\\_diversity\\_report\\_aamd\\_7-28-15.pdf](https://mellon.org/media/filer_public/ba/99/ba99e53a-48d5-4038-80e1-66f9ba1c020e/awmf_museum_diversity_report_aamd_7-28-15.pdf), 2.

2 Ibid.

3 Roger Schonfeld and Liam Sweeney, “Diversity in the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Community,” New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, January 28, 2016, <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/publications/diversity-in-the-new-york-city-department-of-cultural-affairs-community/>, 40.

4 Elissa Hecker and Lane Harwell, “Discovering Disability: Data & NYC Dance,” Dance NYC, May 28, 2015, [http://www.dance.nyc/uploads/DanceNYC-ReportDisability-Final\(Linco\).pdf](http://www.dance.nyc/uploads/DanceNYC-ReportDisability-Final(Linco).pdf), 21. Since this essay was written, Americans for the Arts published a report that includes more information on disability demographics in the arts. The findings show that people with disabilities are underrepresented in the local arts field, supporting the DCLA and Dance NYC findings. The report found, “people with disabilities were represented in the local arts segments at one third of the frequency of the general U.S. population (6 percent vs. 18 percent).” This report also underscores the fact that “disability is arguably one of the most neglected aspects of cultural equity, in part because of the challenge of visibility. Even among the small proportion of respondents who indicated they had a disability, the majority of disabilities reported in this survey would be invisible to others unless self-reported.” Clayton Lord, “Baseline Demographic Survey of the Local Arts Field 2017,” Americans for the Arts, November 2017, <https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/AFTABaselineDemographicRpt2017.pdf>, 5.

5 Schonfeld and Sweeney, “Diversity in the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Community,” 41.

6 R. Roosevelt Thomas, “From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity,” *Harvard Business Review* 68, no. 2 (March/April 1990): 107–17, <https://hbr.org/1990/03/from-affirmative-action-to-affirming-diversity>.



**MUSEUM AS  
SENSORY AND  
SOCIAL SPACE**

**AUTISM  
PROGRAMMING  
AT THE DALLAS  
MUSEUM  
OF ART**

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## EMILY WISKERA

Manager of Access Programs, Dallas Museum of Art

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For any visitor, going to a museum has the potential to be an overwhelming event. Large crowds, new sensory experiences, and expectations of best behavior can act as barriers to enjoying a day in the galleries. This can be especially true for visitors with special needs. However, museums are increasingly putting forth more effort to address the specific needs of the public, including accommodations for people with disabilities. As outlined by Lois H. Silverman in *The Social Work of Museums*, “museums are turning their social activism inward to effect much needed change by readdressing the exclusion and/or misrepresentation of historically excluded groups like people with disabilities.”<sup>1</sup> Access, however, is not only of interest to the public but also to the museum, whose concerns in serving the needs of its entire community, and making its institution accessible, relevant, and sustainable, are paramount.

In continued efforts to create universal, equitable experiences, many museums have recently started creating programs for visitors

with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Autism programming in museums reflects the increase in the prevalence of individuals diagnosed with ASD.<sup>2</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists that as of 2012 about one in sixty-eight children have been diagnosed with ASD according to estimates from the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network.<sup>3</sup> As defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ASD is “a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. . . . People with ASD may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged.”<sup>4</sup>

Since autism is a spectrum disorder, it appears differently in each person. As Stephen Shore, an author with autism and professor of special education, famously said, “If you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism.” Because the characteristics of ASD

are so expansive, individuals on the spectrum require varied and multifaceted supports to accommodate their diverse needs. While the learning challenges and needs of individuals with ASD vary widely, they also share some commonalities, such as the limited development of communication and social skills, and the need for a comfortable learning environment.<sup>5</sup>

Autism is a disability, not a disease, and while effective treatments are available, there is no cure.<sup>6</sup> Though medical treatments exist for ASD, it appears the most effective intervention is educational support that addresses behavioral, social, and communication challenges.<sup>7</sup> It should come as no surprise that museums—informal learning environments that foster the development of behavioral, social, and communication skills—are naturally suited for autism programming. Furthermore, the collections of art museums in particular reflect their position as cultural entities that promote inclusion and celebrate difference and diversity.

The education staff at the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) was conscious of the prevalence of ASD in the community but had noticed that individuals with autism seldom participated in their programs. In a desire to welcome this group in particular, the DMA began providing autism programming in April 2009. Before attempting to create programs addressing ASD, the DMA sought the advice of professionals, experts, children with ASD, and their parents in order to address future participants' individualized desires and needs. Through discussions with the community, the museum received feedback that demonstrated interest in programs that provided a comfortable learning environment where participants could engage with one another while informally developing social and communication skills.

### **Autism Awareness Family Celebration**

The first program initiated by the DMA was the Autism Awareness Family Celebration. Four times per year, the DMA opens two hours early with free admission for children with

ASD and their family members. Welcoming children with ASD and their families into a museum during private hours is not an attempt to separate this population from the rest of the community but rather to provide a time of individualized support by adapting or removing barriers that would otherwise hinder their museum experience. This private time provides an opportunity for children with ASD and their families to socialize and explore the museum in an understanding and supportive environment. An early open gallery time may help people with autism become more familiar and comfortable in the museum space, and even encourage integration into daily museum programming. In an effort to reduce sensory overload, attendance is limited to the first five hundred registrants. Knowing that participants with ASD can be sensitive to various stimuli, the DMA offers an immersive, autism-friendly, low-sensory space, staffed by occupational therapy students from Texas Woman's University. This space is distinguished by low lighting, comfortable seating, and therapy tools, such as weighted blankets (fig. 1).

Event-specific narratives and images about visiting the DMA are sent to families before each event so participants can become acquainted with the museum and its scheduled activities prior to their visit. During the Autism Awareness Family Celebration, families choose from a variety of activities in the DMA's Center for Creative Connections (C3), an interactive and experimental gallery space. At the event, families explore at their own pace, taking part in sensory experiments and art-making activities in the studio, playing games in the sculpture garden, and enjoying an interactive musical performance led by music therapist Diane Powell. Families can also explore the museum's galleries through staff-led experiences, such as story time or teen tours.

Activities at each event are tied to a specific theme chosen in collaboration with Sharon Hartman, a local autism specialist. Hartman has helped design themes such as Rockin'

**FIG. 1**

Participants of Autism Awareness Family Celebration take a break in the Sensory Room, staffed by occupational therapy students from Texas Woman's University.



Robots, Sculpt-o-rama, and Space Explorers, as well as their corresponding art-making activities and sensory experiments. The DMA often brings in special guests to take part, such as the Dallas Symphony Orchestra (DSO), which collaborated on a music-themed event. Former DSO music director Jaap van Zweden spoke to children about movement in music and used a colorful streamer to show how he conducts (fig. 2). Following Van Zweden's instruction, participants joined him in conducting while the DSO performed—a once in a lifetime experience for any music aficionado and a particularly special event for the museum's visitors with autism, for whom the program led to a new way of accessing art and music. Van Zweden's wife, Aaltje van Zweden-van Buuren, talked to parents and caregivers about her family's experience using music therapy with their son, who has autism. In addition to the DSO, the DMA has also collaborated with other local organizations that offer autism programming, such as the Dallas Children's Theater, which hosts informational tables at each event to share its resources with the community.

### **Sensory Scouts**

Based on feedback from parents and participants of the Autism Awareness Family Celebration, the DMA learned there is a strong need in the community for programming specifically tailored to adolescents with ASD. Since there is no cure for autism, children with autism grow up to be adults with autism. While museums and other cultural institutions are increasingly offering programs for children with ASD, there are very few programs designed for adolescents with ASD as they begin navigating the challenges of adulthood. Feedback from participants demonstrated the need for an informal learning environment where adolescents could strengthen their social skills.

Individuals with ASD often have difficulty understanding what other people are thinking, making social interactions a challenge. Those with ASD do not always notice social cues that others seem to understand instinctually.<sup>8</sup> However, social skills can be learned through practice, especially during adolescent years when individuals with ASD have the tendency to become more aware of their own social isolation.<sup>9</sup>

In January 2017 the DMA established Sensory Scouts, the museum's newest program offering for visitors with ASD. Sensory Scouts is a monthly thematic workshop designed specifically around the needs of adolescents with ASD. This program allows participants to explore works of art through gallery discussion, sensory explorations, art making in the studio, and social skills activities designed in collaboration with a specialist. Participants have the opportunity to attend the program independently, but if they are not comfortable attending unaccompanied, parents and caregivers are always welcome.

At the beginning of each program, museum staff explain the day's activities with an illustrated schedule. The pictures in the schedule depict the day's events in easily identifiable graphics, which can help alleviate participants' anxiety. The theme of the program changes each month but always focuses on a specific social skill. For example, participants have learned about expressing their own feelings and understanding the moods of others in the Emotions in Art program. In the Stories in Art program, participants practice improvised speech through storytelling. Following each program, parents and caregivers are provided with a summary of the conversations and skills

## Museums are a common ground for human diversity, embracing difference and promoting understanding and respect among people from different communities.

explored during the program, including ideas for extended learning.

In Sensory Scouts, the museum functions differently from a typical classroom. Museum staff act as facilitators, rather than teachers, and consider themselves to be among a community of learners along with the program participants.<sup>10</sup> The staff enables and encourages the learning process through dialogue and engagement in which participants bring value to the program through their unique identities and experiences. Group identity is encouraged through collaborative gallery activities and discussion. While works of art act as the catalyst for conversation, staff members do not place great importance on participants acquiring a discrete body of facts, such as the artwork title or date of creation. Rather the value lies in the participants contributing to a learning community and making individually

**FIG. 2**

Jaap van Zweden uses a colorful streamer to demonstrate the importance of movement in his work as a symphony conductor.



meaningful pathways to make connections between the art and the world around them. This approach reflects Jeremy Roschelle’s sentiment that for adolescents with autism “growing ability to *participate* in a community-based culture has precedence over ability to *know*.”<sup>11</sup>

Following time in the galleries, participants return to the studio for a hands-on art activity. Art projects are designed to relate to the program’s theme and emphasize experimentation and discovery over a final product. For the Stories in Art lesson, participants created “story dice,” wooden blocks on which they drew images to represent the different elements of a story, such as character and setting (fig. 3). Then participants took turns rolling their dice and telling stories to one another in a way that combined their story dice elements. Through art projects such as this, participants of Sensory Scouts explore their self-identity and have the opportunity to express themselves creatively to others.<sup>12</sup>

Museums are a common ground for human diversity, embracing difference and promoting understanding and respect among people from different communities. As such, they hold a distinct responsibility to the public to ensure equitable access to their collections through unique programs and services. In recent years, art museums have become increasingly committed to articulating their social value as agents of inclusion in the cultural sector. Museums continue to be a locus where tailored programs can affirm the abilities of visitors with special needs and others who are frequently underserved. These programs, while aimed at addressing the unique needs of visitors, including those with autism, also benefit the museum. As the museum becomes more accessible, relevant, and significant to its public, its operations become increasingly supported and sustained by the community. The museum—an inclusive environment that supports lifelong learning—promotes meaningful experiences reflecting the complexity of both artworks and its visitors, supports multiple perspectives, and builds lasting relationships. ■



**FIG. 3**

“Story dice” created by participants of Sensory Scouts to practice storytelling

1 Lois H. Silverman, *The Social Work of Museums* (London: Routledge, 2010), 20.

2 It is possible that the odds of being born with autism have not actually increased, but rather that parents and doctors are now better equipped to accurately diagnose autism than in previous years. As awareness of ASD has increased, more cases have been recognized and diagnoses made.

3 “Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Data & Statistics,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>.

4 “Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Facts about ASD,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html>.

5 Margo A. Mastropieri and Thomas E. Scruggs. *The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Instruction* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 2000), 92.

6 See Uta Frith, *Autism: Explaining the Enigma* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

7 Ian Dempsey and Phil Foreman, “A Review of Educational Approaches for Individuals with Autism,” *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 48, no. 1 (2001): 103–16.

8 Frith, *Autism: Explaining the Enigma*, 154–55.

9 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), 50–56.

10 The phrase “community of learners” comes from psychologist Jerome Bruner. Bruner endorses the approach to education in which students work together according to their abilities to help one another learn. Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 24.

11 Jeremy Roschelle, “Learning in Interactive Environments: Prior Knowledge and New Experience,” in *Public Institutions for Personal Learning: Establishing a Research Agenda*, ed. J. H. Falk and L. D. Dierking (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1995), 37–51.

12 See Jan Osborne, “Art and the Child with Autism: Therapy or Education?,” *Early Child Development and Care* 173, no. 4 (2003): 411–23.

**THE RAISE  
PROGRAM  
AT THE CLARK**  
**ENGAGING WITH  
HUMANITY AT AN  
ART MUSEUM**

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## RONNA TULGAN OSTHEIMER

Director of Education, Clark Art Institute

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Art museums offer a space for connecting with and validating humanity, an increasingly important function in a world that can be dehumanizing and rife with competition and conflict. Responding to Art Involves Self Expression (RAISE)—the first of many specialized outreach programs that have been hosted at the Clark Art Institute—has greatly benefitted participants, helped staff become more aware of our own practice of museum education (what we do and why and how we do it), and influenced how we think about our other educational programs.

RAISE is a five-week mandated program for adjudicated youth within the Berkshire County court system. A judge sentences participants to attend RAISE as an alternative to more traditional methods of correction and punishment. The Clark offers it twice a year—in November and March—with eight to twelve participants (ages eleven to eighteen) in each group.

The Clark developed the program in 2005 as an effort to see how the museum could develop a relevant program for an atypical group. The program evolved organically and was originally sparked by a conversation I had with a friend, Jude Locke, a judge who had recently been appointed to serve on our county’s juvenile court. We were discussing another local alternative sentencing program, Shakespeare in the Courts, which had just won a President George H. W. Bush Points of Light award. At the time, Shakespeare in the Courts—hosted by Shakespeare and Company, a theater in nearby Lenox, Massachusetts—was the only alternative sentencing option in our county and one of the few in the country that had been developed in partnership with a cultural organization. Its success and the national attention the award generated prompted the local juvenile court to connect with other cultural venues in the area to develop a variety of similar programs. Locke was hoping the Clark might be interested. Berkshire County is known for its plethora of art institutions, and the court’s goal was to build a model for the

alternative sentencing initiative by offering programs that went beyond remediation and education and instead exposed young offenders to new experiences that could help them think about themselves and their lives in different ways. The Clark was an especially significant place for Locke; she had her swearing-in ceremony there and was convinced the museum could make a difference.

Such an initiative was unusual for the Clark at the time—now thirteen years ago. The museum has a renowned historical collection of Western art and a reputation for exhibitions that look closely and afresh at well-known subjects in the art world. It is also a research center for scholarship in the visual arts. With this dual mission rooted in the academic discipline of art history, the Clark is recognized as an authoritative voice in the field. The role of the education department at the museum has been to make the Clark's notable scholarship accessible to the general public by designing programs that teach interested groups and individuals about our collection and their art-historical contexts.

Most visitors come to the Clark because they are interested in our collection, not because they were mandated to attend. Uncertain about whether this group would even want to learn about art, I knew developing a program that would be meaningful might require new approaches to our practice. Nonetheless, I believed in the value of art education and art's power to impact people's lives, as well as in sharing the museum with a wider audience. Excited by the possibilities of this programmatic idea, I began to discuss the request with colleagues.

While my peers in the education department shared my enthusiasm for this new idea, other colleagues met the suggestion with reservations. Concerns centered on potential for disruptive behavior, how a group of adjudicated kids might interact with other visitors, and the safety of the art (considering



**FIG. 1**

Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917), *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (detail), modeled 1879–81, cast 1919–21. Bronze with gauze tutu and silk ribbon, on wooden base, h. 39 in. (99 cm). Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1955.45

that some individuals were referred to the program specifically for damaging property and acting out). I set up an appointment with the Clark's director at the time, Michael Conforti, to discuss the idea. As a leader in the museum field, Conforti was eager to develop innovative programming to show how a museum could further serve the needs of its community; he quickly offered his full support and suggestions for addressing others' apprehensions.

From the beginning, the education department welcomed the challenge that RAISE presented. We were already adept at developing differentiated programs for distinct audiences and interests, and we prided ourselves on tailoring each program rather than offering scripted or predetermined content. We had often connected gallery talks with more familiar themes, such as American history or the natural sciences, for groups other than those studying art. Organizing themes helped us realize that we did not need to share everything about each object, and they

served as a vehicle to make learning about our collection more relevant. Still, common to all of our programs had been the expectation and assumption of using the discipline of art history to contextualize discussion.

RAISE challenged this expectation because its very objective, as articulated by the court, is not to learn about art. Rather, the goal is for participants to think about themselves and their lives in new ways so that they might make more constructive behavioral decisions and ultimately have more control over their own choices. The organizing theme would not be a vehicle for learning about art, like other programs. Learning about art would be a vehicle for a (hopefully) transformative, reflective personal experience—what we had typically believed was a possible secondary benefit. Designing a program for this group would extend the boundaries of our usual practice and would even reframe the understood purpose of our work.

The challenge pushed members of our department to take a pause from busy schedules to carefully and thoughtfully outline a program that would respond to the court's request. We reflected on what we did, why we did

it, and what else we could do. To establish a foundation for this effort, we identified our work's most basic ambition, which we believed was teaching about art. To clarify further, we developed a working definition of art: "an expression or reflection of human experience and imagination." Considering this meaning, we began to realize that learning about art does not need to assume an art-historical foundation. It instead could offer an opportunity to explore a multiplicity of human dynamics (including the idea of what it means to be human), to consider and discuss philosophical issues, and to validate universal aspects of humanity. This concept of art education dovetailed with the goal for the RAISE participants to think about their lives in new ways and to establish more positive self-awareness. At the Clark, we conceived of this as being more conscious of human experiences, strengths, and potential (in general and one's own) in day-to-day life. Our working definition of art enabled us to reframe our role in the program as teaching participants to engage with art rather than teaching about art.

Next we thought about our collection through the lens of positive self-awareness, and this led to flexible, alternative understandings of our objects and what might be learned from

**FIG. 2**

Frederic Remington (American, 1861–1909), *Friends or Foes? (The Scout)* (detail), 1902–05. Oil on canvas, 27 x 40 in. (68.6 x 101.6 cm). Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1945, 1955.12



**FIG. 3**

Participants in RAISE in the Clark's Penthouse Boardroom, which serves as their classroom for the five-week program



them. Edgar Degas's *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (modeled 1879–81, cast 1919–21, fig. 1)—which was considered unusual and harshly criticized when first exhibited, prompting Degas to never publically show another sculpture during his lifetime—gave us an opportunity to talk about reactions to failure, how time changes the perception of it, and how Marie (the model for the sculpture) presented herself as self-possessed even under difficult circumstances. (Modeling, as well as being a novice ballerina, could be both physically and emotionally demanding.) Frederic Remington's *Friends or Foes? (The Scout)* (1902–05, fig. 2)—a sensitive portrayal of a Native American and loss after the Indian Wars—provides context for discussions about the importance of a single decision, the devastating consequences of prejudice and injustice, how we may act or feel differently at different times of day, and even our relationships with pets and other animals. We still planned to share art-historical information. For example, when looking at *Little Dancer*, we could give background about Degas as an Impressionist artist, Impressionism as a radical and experimental movement for its time, which influenced the

techniques and materials the artist used, and the story of the sculpture's original exhibition. But presenting this information would not be the purpose of the conversation. Instead, this learning could serve as a foundation for more general and potentially personally meaningful, open-ended exchanges.

Now that we have been conducting the RAISE program for many years, we have learned that the strength of this program is that there are no definitive answers in these conversations, no single voice of authority. Instead the dialogues encourage participants to be reflective, express their perspectives, and listen to others. Although the topics are personal, the focus on art anchors the discussions and allows for participants to choose whether or not, or how much, to share of their own stories. Throughout the program the students become increasingly comfortable participating, revealing more of themselves, and supporting one another, and they demonstrate greater cooperative, prosocial behavior.

In its fifth year, we began to feel confident with the content and sequence of the program and developed a curriculum guide based on the following objectives for participants:

- To learn to look at, think about, and talk about art in a meaningful way
- To expand their sense of human experience and possibility, including a more constructive sense of how they fit into the larger world
- To realize their views matter
- To consider an art museum as a place where they belong

Each week of the RAISE program involves guided and independent time in the galleries and activities in the Penthouse Boardroom, which serves as the classroom (fig. 3). It is rare for an educational program to be approved to use this space, but this privilege communicates to the participants and the Clark staff how much the institution values RAISE, contributing to the participants' sense of positive self-awareness.

Custodial adults and court personnel attend the program's last session. The participants guide them around the museum in small groups prior to a closing ceremony and celebration. This marks the first time these groups of people have come together since each sentencing hearing, but in this scenario the young people occupy a very different role.

By all available measures, the program is successful in helping participants to think about themselves and their lives in new ways and to foster a new sense of self. The change in the participants' posture—both physical and attitudinal—is visible and significant over the five weeks. After each program we collect qualitative feedback from the participants and their custodial adults. Comments include: "I guess I really AM smart," "I can do good in life," "I like art and art museums," and "I wish that the program wouldn't end." From one parent: "My son was angry and hesitant about attending this program. He just about refused to walk in the first week. When he returned home, he was so excited about what he had learned. He could not wait for the following weeks. My son is a much more

confident individual after the program. I am so pleased to have the opportunity to have my son's life impacted with such a rich and worthwhile program."

Of course RAISE is not a positive experience for everyone, but most feedback is excellent. Moreover, the success of the program is more than anecdotal. In 2011 the Clark commissioned a formal, three-year study that included three methods of assessment: a pre- and post-program self-analysis measure; post-program feedback from participants, custodial adults, and court personnel; and an observer rating of participant behavior during the program. The executive summary states:

The subjective experiences of the student participants and their parents were overwhelmingly positive. The students' own words suggest that they "got" the intended lessons about art and about themselves and their potential. The results from the more objective measures echoed these impressions. Specifically, students' pre- and post-program self-reported ratings of their opinions about art and their opinions about themselves showed statistically significant increases. The increases were particularly strong for their opinions about art; for many, this was their first exposure to art. Outside observers' ratings of the students' behavior during the classes (engagement, participation, socially appropriate behavior, connecting with the art, etc.) also showed large and statistically significant increases from the first to the last session. In all, the findings suggest that the RAISE program is working to accomplish its stated goals.<sup>1</sup>

The courts do not share participants' recidivism rates, but Judge Locke has suggested to me that it is next to zero for RAISE participants. In an overview of RAISE written to share with other courts, she described it as "one of the most effective

and uplifting programs offered through the Berkshire County Juvenile Probation Department—a revelation of emotion, a moment of discovery that is as rewarding as anything I have witnessed in my personal or professional life.”

Staff members from all corners of the Clark take pride in the fact that our museum hosts RAISE. Other visitors also appreciate sharing the galleries with the RAISE participants; on more than one occasion we have even received impromptu donations to support the program because of these interactions. The press has appreciated the program, and the newspaper stories and journal articles have provided positive publicity for the program and institute more broadly. We have also won a number of local, national, and international awards for RAISE and have shared the curriculum with a number of other museums in the United States and abroad.<sup>2</sup>

The Clark began hosting RAISE as a service to and partnership with the courts, and with the goal of helping troubled youth learn about and construct who they may be in the world. Thirteen years later, we have seen that the impact on both the participants and our institution has been considerable. The program’s success has changed how we think about museum education at the Clark. We had previously understood our job as teaching about art from an art-historical perspective; we had never questioned our reasoning and assumed it was valid. RAISE has pushed us to consider how and why art is important and even to question its definition.

RAISE forced us to reflect on our practice of museum education and to experiment—to prioritize personally relevant experiences over an academic approach. We originally figured that this new way of thinking about our work would be situational, but our experience with the program has encouraged us to change our perceptions about our roles within the museum and as teachers for all of

## **RAISE has spurred us to think about art education as an activity that involves personal awareness and growth, psychological development, and social impact.**

our audiences. For many visitors, engaging with art and having a personally relevant experience still means learning about it in the traditional historical sense. But RAISE has provided a method for being relevant to audiences who may not wish to focus on art history, as well as for reexamining our collection; we now realize that objects tell many stories beyond the art historical and even may conjure some of our own.

Inspired by our work on the RAISE program, we have developed a branch of outreach offerings that target groups who might benefit from a similar approach, including people with dementia and their caregivers, developmentally delayed adults, mental health-care providers and clients, and new parents. We have designed school programs with comparable goals to RAISE, and our new techniques have even infiltrated some of our more traditional programs. RAISE has spurred us to think about art education as an activity that involves personal awareness and growth, psychological development, and social impact. Through art-based dialogues, museum education can create space to contemplate what it means to be human and to realize a new vision of “what we may be.” ■

1 Laurie Heatherington, Marissa Lowe, and Jennifer Oswald, *Raise Evaluation Report*, June 3, 2014, unpublished.

2 American Association of Museums EdCom Excellence in Programming Award, 2010; Arts | Learning Outstanding Arts Collaborative Award, 2011; International Council of Museums Best Practice Award, 2013; Finalist for the Institute of Museum and Library Services National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, 2017.



**FIG. 4**

A RAISE participant studying William-Adolphe Bouguereau's *Nymphs and Satyr*, 1873. William-Adolphe Bouguereau (French, 1825–1905), *Nymphs and Satyr*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 102 1/2 x 72 in. (260.4 x 182.9 cm). Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Acquired by Sterling and Francine Clark, 1955.658

**MUSEUMS  
AND ENGLISH  
LEARNERS  
INCLUSION  
VERSUS  
EXCLUSION**

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## VERONICA ALVAREZ

Director of School and Teacher Programs, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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Overlooking the majestic Pacific Ocean in Malibu is a replica of a first-century Roman country house, the Getty Villa. This was where I made my first museum visit as a nine-year-old fourth-grade student; it was also the first time I had ever seen the ocean and the first time I had ever worn a brand-new dress. The seventh child in a family of nine, I had only ever worn hand-me-downs. However, my mother felt that a visit to a museum was an important enough occasion to merit a new dress. I took in all the artwork, gardens, and ancient Roman-inspired architecture that the richest person in the world during his time, J. Paul Getty, had left as his legacy. I had to absorb all the visuals around me because although a pleasant lady gave us a tour of the site, I could not understand a word she was saying because I did not speak English. It was beyond my imagination at the time that one day I would work in a museum training the educators who provide those types of tours to the students of Los Angeles, many of whom, like myself, are Latino immigrants whose first language is not English.

### English Learners as Part of the US Population

After Congress loosened immigration quotas in 1965, the makeup of immigrants to the United States changed significantly, with more than 80 percent of new immigrants coming from Asia and Latin America.<sup>1</sup> In the decade between 1990 and 2000, the Latino population increased by 58 percent to 35.3 million in the United States,<sup>2</sup> resulting in Spanish becoming the second-most spoken language in the nation.<sup>3</sup> Further, it is expected that by the year 2050 the Latino population will have doubled, comprising 30 percent of the total US population, with the white population dropping to below 50 percent, effectively creating a minority-majority population within the next thirty-five years.<sup>4</sup>

These demographic shifts have major implications for museums. In 2008 the American Association of Museums (now the American Alliance of Museums) published its first forecasting report, “Museums & Society 2034: Trends and Potential Futures.” It notes that while one in three Americans

is a minority (34 percent), this group only comprises 9 percent of core museumgoers, signifying that 91 percent of core museumgoers are white. If museums want to remain relevant to their communities, they will need to adapt to changing demographics. These figures also align closely with museum staffing. In 2015 the American Association of Museum Directors (AAMD) and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation released a report on staff diversity in art museums. Of those in positions “closely associated with the intellectual and educational mission of museums”—including curators, conservators, educators, and leadership—84 percent were white, 6 percent Asian, 4 percent black, 3 percent Latino, and 3 percent identified as two or more races.<sup>5</sup> Thus, both museumgoers and museum staffs are often not representative of the communities in which they are located.

While the United States is set to become a minority-majority country, Los Angeles is already a minority-majority city. According to the 2010 United States Census, non-Hispanic whites make up 28 percent of the population in the city, Latinos make up at 48 percent, blacks make up 9 percent, and Asians make up 11 percent.<sup>6</sup> Of this population, the majority, or 60 percent, of Angelinos speak a language other than English at home (as compared to 21 percent of the American population as a whole).<sup>7</sup> For these reasons, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has long been committed to providing resources and a welcoming atmosphere to its diverse constituency.

### English Learners at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Almost as soon as museums were established in the United States, art museums positioned themselves—and were seen by the publics they served—as educational institutions.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, museums have been seen as elitist institutions geared toward an educated audience,<sup>9</sup> leaving “those without the relevant

## If museums want to remain relevant to their communities, they will need to adapt to changing demographics.

background knowledge . . . feeling excluded and alienated by the experience.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as mentioned above, the majority of visitors to art museums are generally whiter, older, and wealthier than the general population.<sup>11</sup>

LACMA has historically reached out to the diverse audiences that make up the city of Los Angeles. The 1999 exhibition *Diego Rivera: Art and Revolution* presented one of the biggest opportunities do so—an exhibition the museum’s administration believed would appeal to LA’s largely Latino population.<sup>12</sup> As part of the exhibition, LACMA created bilingual materials, including didactic labels, a biographical time line, an audio tour, and printed guides for families. The museum saw the exhibition as an opportunity to reach out directly to this audience by conducting exit interviews with visitors, as well as by organizing focus groups to gauge visitors’ needs and expectations. Audience evaluations from other institutions have shown that it is important for Latino families to feel welcomed, indicating that bilingual access was a vital component of their museum-going experience.<sup>13</sup> These factors are important and help overcome minority visitors’ reservations about museums—places they could feel are unwelcoming and not necessarily seen as part of their communities.<sup>14</sup>

Through a partnership with one of the biggest Spanish-speaking television stations in the country, LACMA was also able to provide a day of free admission. By marketing directly to diverse audiences, the museum brought in a demographic that is more representative of the city’s population. This has in turn led

to an ongoing commitment to hire bilingual staff, continue bilingual programming, and create an atmosphere of, as one colleague calls it, “radical friendliness”<sup>15</sup>—the idea that every visitor belongs at the museum. Therefore, LACMA’s education programming and interactions with visitors are based on making them feel welcomed and providing an inclusive environment.

While several museums have done audience evaluations and have often discussed diversifying audiences, one audience that constitutes a large portion of museum visitorships is students on school field trips. In fact, 96 percent of museums host field trips, and, of these, the majority (60 percent) are taught by docents<sup>16</sup> or volunteers, and 40 percent by museum staff educators.<sup>17</sup> However, an extensive literature review revealed only two studies on the effectiveness of these field trips for English Learners.<sup>18</sup>

### **K–12 English Learners in the US Population**

The influx of Latino immigrants has had a tremendous impact on schools in the United States, resulting in an increase of 120 percent (from 2 to 4.4 million) of Latino students from 1968 to 1998.<sup>19</sup> These students, English Learners (or ELs, meaning students whose first language is not English), require support and are met with varying degrees of responses from local communities, organizations, and schools. According to the 2016 US Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, in the 2013–14 school year 9.3 percent of students were designated as English Learners, an estimated 4.5 million students. The first decade of the twenty-first century saw a 57 percent increase in the number of EL students in the United States.<sup>20</sup> While the largest increase in the EL student population has been in the southern United States—Louisiana (42.7 percent) and Mississippi (50.6 percent) in particular<sup>21</sup>—California still has the highest population of ELs, with 1.3 million students, which is roughly 21 percent of its K–12 student population.<sup>22</sup>

### **K–12 English Learners in the Art Museum**

Although the professionalization of the field of museum education took some time to develop, early on museums saw their role as partners to school communities.<sup>23</sup> Museums, as informal educational institutions, have sought to fill the void when there is a lack of art programming in the formal education environment. This, along with museums’ current need for relevancy with a more diverse constituency in the K–12 system, brings great benefits and challenges. On the one hand, museums are in a compelling position to become significant partners in the K–12 setting because almost every museum in the country offers field trips or promotes outreach efforts to K–12 school audiences.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, museums in general, and museum education departments in particular, must address important questions: How are museums training their teaching staff to address the needs of K–12 students? If a large number of K–12 students are English Learners, how do museum educators address or support them at the art museum?

Increasingly, museums have sought to address these issues by seeking partnerships with school communities in order to provide and/or augment an arts education that schools do not or cannot provide.<sup>25</sup> While the majority of partnerships result in single field trips to the museum, some museums provide multiple-week residencies by teaching artists directly in school classrooms.<sup>26</sup>

As public funding for the arts has decreased, museums face an increasing demand to fulfill their educational roles.<sup>27</sup> Cuts to art programs in schools have been so severe that in California 61 percent of K–12 schools do not employ one full-time art specialist.<sup>28</sup> Schools with more minority students often have a less rigorous curriculum<sup>29</sup> and little or no arts curriculum,<sup>30</sup> even though the arts have shown to have a positive impact on students of color by raising student attendance, lowering drop-out rates, and

improving student motivation.<sup>31</sup> Although the Elementary and Secondary Education Acts of 1992 and 2002 cited the arts as “core” subject areas, they lag behind areas of the curriculum promoted by standardized testing, such as math and language arts.<sup>32</sup> However, there is little or no research on how the arts impact the performance of EL students.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, there is very little research on how museums and their educators affect student learning. (The National Art Education Association and the Association of Art Museum Directors is currently conducting a national, multiyear study addressing the benefits of visits to art museums during the formal school day.)<sup>34</sup>

### Schools Can't Do It Alone: LACMA and School Partnerships

Museums have long formed school partnerships and provided teaching artists to fulfill roles that are not available in the traditional classroom. To cite one example of these types of arrangements, LACMA has a four-year partnership with three school districts: Compton Unified, Torrance Unified, and Los Angeles Unified. This means that teaching artists primarily work with Latino populations as they make up, for most part, the largest ethnicity in each of the districts. (Latinos make up 77 percent of students in Compton Unified, 74 percent in Los Angeles Unified, and 28 percent in Torrance Unified, which is slightly less than its largest demographic—29 percent Asian).<sup>35</sup>

During the four years of the partnership with these audiences, LACMA's teaching artists provide standards-aligned arts education for six weeks to every student at two elementary schools and four weeks of arts instruction to students at the feeder middle school in each of the three districts. LACMA's teaching artists collaborate with the classroom teachers in order to align their lessons with what is already being taught as part of the regular classroom curricula.

The final visit to the classroom is meant to be cotaught by the classroom teacher and teaching artist. The final lesson is implemented in this way in order to address the fact that classroom teachers often do not feel equipped to teach art.<sup>36</sup> Thus, teaching artists support educators by providing ideas and skills so that they can take ownership of arts instruction in their classrooms. However, as noted in *A Report on the Teaching Artist Research Project*, teaching artists who work for museums often do not have a background or formal education in pedagogy.<sup>37</sup>

### Connection to Social Justice

In order for art museums to succeed in attracting new audiences, as many have stated is their intent, they need to abide by their support for K–12 education. If they are authentic partners to their school audiences, they must be just as rigorous in training their teaching staff and in creating high-quality programming. The visual arts have proven successful in engaging minority students, yet these are the students least exposed to quality arts education.<sup>38</sup> Because the use of visuals is an effective teaching strategy for English acquisition,<sup>39</sup> art museums are in a unique position to provide that programming. However, because effective teaching practices for ELs have been limited by the fact that classroom teachers feel unprepared, what does this mean for museum educators? If teacher preparation programs are not adequately addressing EL instruction, then what are museums doing to prepare their staff of museum educators, many of whom do not have education backgrounds?

If art museums want to stay relevant, they need to serve diverse audiences and hire diverse staff. Despite the fact that museums have made a commitment to engage diverse audiences, low-income, minority populations represent a demographic that museums have struggled to engage<sup>40</sup>—both in terms of visitorship and hiring practices. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation report cited

earlier states that just 3 percent of museum educators surveyed were Latino. In 2005 professor and museum educator David Ebitz asked, “Are we paying lip service to diversity in our hiring practices?”<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, the answer to his question thirteen years later continues to be “yes.”

### **Museum Education Today: A Path toward Legitimacy or Irrelevancy?**

In 1979 Bonnie Baskin wrote: “museum educators are in a unique position to teach art as a primary human and cultural document, a subject in its own right.”<sup>42</sup> These optimistic words indicate that museum educators and teaching artists were poised to assert their unique skills in both formal and informal art education arenas. Moreover, in 1977 Nelson Graburn stated that museums are “*par excellence* the symbol of modernity” and “are the symbols and repositories of the security, the knowledge, and the answers” that people expect. He also asserted that museums “have overtaken the churches and are competing with the schools as the forums of education.”<sup>43</sup>

In 1980 the American Association of Museums appointed a commission tasked with ensuring the relevance of museums and their responsiveness to changing social conditions. They noted that in order to maintain their germaneness, “it is essential that museum professionals understand that the educational role of museums is as important as the museum’s collecting responsibilities,” and that “museums have an opportunity to contribute to the national agenda for education.” The commission also advocated that museums should be included in national educational reform for they would “contribute greatly to excellence in the educational system.”<sup>44</sup>

More and more, the notion that museums are bastions of information is being challenged by postmodernist ideas. With the collapse of modernism, “the self-imposed autonomy and

**In order to stay relevant, museum educators and museums in general must address the need to give voice to those who have been silent, and to allow for multiple and alternative interpretations of artworks, a constructivist approach to learning.**

denial of political responsibility results in an approach to museum education that makes itself irrelevant,” cautions Juliet Moore Tapia.<sup>45</sup> Thus, museum educators must ground their practice in theory in order to challenge these notions and legitimize their programmatic decisions. In his discussion of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)—developed by cognitive psychologist Abigail Housen and museum educator Philip Yenawine, the VTS approach is characterized by the use of three questions: “What is going on in this artwork? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?”—Ebitz laments that its strength lies less in Housen’s research on aesthetic development and more in the fact that its three formulaic questions are easy to ask in the museum and to replicate in the classroom.<sup>46</sup>

Ebitz points out that while theories that inform museum educators’ practice address objects, people, and learning, they are not critical theories that seek to address postmodern notions.<sup>47</sup> Thus, they miss ideas such as feminist theory, critical race theory, the power dynamics of institutions and the individual, the postcolonial theory of who gets to interpret the art objects and artifacts from different cultures, or the ethical responsibility of the museum for the stories it tells—the worlds it constructs for the viewer.

Further, postmodern museum education advocates that we diminish the boundaries between art and everyday life and collapse the notions of high versus low culture.<sup>48</sup>

Ebitz states that we have to problematize our understanding of museums' functions. The continued reliance on the curatorial voice in how artworks are displayed and interpreted in accompanying texts read by visitors provides curators with a hierarchical authority and institutional power.<sup>49</sup> Such power dynamics disproportionately affect people of color and linguistic minority groups. Moreover, the reliance on text in a museum setting can potentially exclude English Learners, for whom the language can be inaccessible. Thus, museums should examine issues of authorship, context, and the diversity of their visitors and understand that "a singular, truthful or definitive interpretation of an art object, as traditional practices sought, is a myth."<sup>50</sup>

"Unlike most scientific theories, critical theories are ethical theories, self-conscious, self-critical, and potentially emancipatory," comments Ebitz.<sup>51</sup> We need museum educators and teaching artists to understand their role in the context of the power and authority that museums represent. Tapia proposes this question: "How can the field develop a theory and practice of postmodern education that is of high pedagogical value and simultaneously allows the coming to voice of diverse speakers?"<sup>52</sup> In order to stay relevant, museum educators and museums in general must address the need to give voice to those who have been silent, and to allow for multiple and alternative interpretations of artworks, a constructivist approach to learning. This means museums need to move beyond dictating the takeaways from their exhibitions, publications, and educational programs, and instead break down the inherent power structure to allow for multiple histories of institutions and objects to be constructed in order to engage authentically

with diverse communities. If museum educators and teaching artists do not gain self-awareness through critical theory, they and their programs will become irrelevant in our increasingly diverse, multifaceted world—one that is inclusive of English Learners, a progressively larger demographic of K–12 students in the United States. ■

<sup>1</sup> Victoria-María MacDonald, *Latino Education in the United States: A Narrated History from 1513–2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 277.

<sup>2</sup> MacDonald, *Latino Education in the United States*, 277.

<sup>3</sup> M. G. Arreguín-Anderson and K. D. Kennedy, "Deliberate Language Planning in Environmental Education: A CRT/LatCrit Perspective," *Journal of Environmental Education* 44, no. 1 (2013): 1–15.

<sup>4</sup> Betty Farrell and Maria Medvedeva, *Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums* (Washington, DC: AAM Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Schonfeld and Mariët Westermann, "The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey Report," The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the American Association of Museum Directors, July 28, 2015, [https://mellon.org/media/filer\\_public/ba/99/ba99e53a-48d5-4038-80e1-66f9ba1c020e/awmf\\_museum\\_diversity\\_report\\_aamd\\_7-28-15.pdf](https://mellon.org/media/filer_public/ba/99/ba99e53a-48d5-4038-80e1-66f9ba1c020e/awmf_museum_diversity_report_aamd_7-28-15.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> "2010 United States Census," US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/2010census/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee, *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011); Tracie E. Constantino, "Training Aesthetic Perception: John Dewey on the Educational Role of Art Museums," *Educational Theory* 54, no. 4 (November 2004): 399–417; Emily Curran, "Discovering the History of Museum Education," *Journal of Museum Education* 20, no. 2 (1995): 5–16; Karen Knutson, "Creating a Space for Learning: Curators, Educators, and the Implied Audience," in Gaea Leinhardt, Kevin Crowley, and Karen Knutson, *Learning Conversations in Museums* (Boca Raton, FL: Taylor and Francis, 2002), 5–44.

<sup>9</sup> Constantino, "Training Aesthetic Perception," 399–417; Knutson, "Creating a Space for Learning," 5–44.

<sup>10</sup> Leinhardt et al., *Learning Conversations in Museums*, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Farrell and Medvedeva, *Demographic Transformation*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> While it is important to engage in culturally responsive programming and exhibitions, it is not accurate to assume that Latino or other culturally diverse audiences will *only* be interested in exhibitions and programs that represent their cultures.

<sup>13</sup> V. Betancourt and M. Salazar, "Engaging Latino Audiences: Visitor Studies in Practice at the Denver Art Museum," in *Multiculturalism in Art Museums Today*, ed. Joni Boyd Acuff (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2014), 181–96.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Alicia Vogl Saenz, Senior Education Coordinator of Family Programs, coined this term. Her blog post on the topic can be found here: <https://shambhalatimes.org/2013/03/13/radical-friendliness-5/>.

- <sup>16</sup> The earliest use of the word “docent” appeared in 1906 in “The Educational Work of the Museum: Retrospect and Prospect,” a bulletin published by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It requested the trustees of the museum to consider the permanent appointment “of one or more persons of intelligence and education who could act as intermediaries . . . glad to avail themselves of trained instruction in the galleries. These docents, as it has been proposed to call them . . .” Burnham and Kai-Kee, *Teaching in the Art Museum*, 19. They were meant to be “interpreters of objects,” not “an instructor of subjects.” Ann I. Bay, “Practicality in the Light of Perfection,” *Roundtable Reports* 9, no. 2/3 (1984), Museum Education: Past, Present, and Future, 2. Many of the teaching methods used by docents during the turn of the century are currently being touted as best practices in the field of museum education, including “object-based teaching, education that is responsive to the needs and interests of the individual learner, and age appropriate activities.” Curran, “Discovering the History of Museum Education,” 6. While initially paid positions, docent positions would eventually be filled by volunteers, usually white, well-to-do women who had leisure time and sought to fulfill a sense of volunteerism. For this reason, the profession of paid interpreters or educators stagnated. David Ebitz, “Sufficient Foundation: Theory in the Practice of Art Museum Education,” *Visual Arts Research* 34, no. 67 (2008): 14.
- <sup>17</sup> Randi Korn and Associates, “Summary of Results Survey of Single-visit K–12 Art Museum Programs” (2015), <https://arteducators-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/172c3f4a795-1541-486e-9110-8227db110582.pdf?1451956086>.
- <sup>18</sup> Marla K. Shoemaker, “‘Art Is a Wonderful Place to Be’: ESL Students as Museum Learners,” *Art Education* 51, no. 2 (1998). Shoemaker describes a two-year partnership between a local middle school of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The only other article that addresses museums and English Learners is a study of a two-year partnership between a school with a high level of English Learners and several museums in San Diego: Lannie Kanevsky, Michael Corke, and Lorri Frangkiser, “The Academic Resilience and Psychosocial Characteristics of Inner-City English Learners in a Museum-Based School Program,” *Education and Urban Society* 40, no. 4 (2008): 452–75.
- <sup>19</sup> MacDonald, *Latino Education in the United States*, 277.
- <sup>20</sup> K. Cadiero-Kaplan, M. Lavadenz, and E. Armas, “Essential Elements of Effective Practices for English Learners,” *Californian’s Together Policy Brief* (Long Beach, CA: 2012), 1–5.
- <sup>21</sup> “Office of English Language Acquisition: Fast Facts; Profiles of English Learners (ELs),” National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2017), [https://ncela.ed.gov/files/fast\\_facts/OELAFastFactsProfilesOELs.pdf](https://ncela.ed.gov/files/fast_facts/OELAFastFactsProfilesOELs.pdf).
- <sup>22</sup> “Facts about English Learners in California,” California Department of Education (2015), <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/cefelfacts.asp>
- <sup>23</sup> Constantino, “Training Aesthetic Perception,” 399–417; Ebitz, “Sufficient Foundation,” 14–24.
- <sup>24</sup> Randi Korn and Associates, “Summary of Results Survey of Single-Visit K–12 Art Museum Programs.”
- <sup>25</sup> Constantino, “Training Aesthetic Perception,” 399–417; Ebitz, “Sufficient Foundation,” 14–24.
- <sup>26</sup> R. Rabkin, M. Reynolds, E. Hedberg, and J. Shelby, *A Report on the Teaching Artist Research Project: Teaching Artists and the Future of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Randi Korn and Associates, “Summary of Results Survey of Single-Visit K–12 Art Museum Programs.”
- <sup>27</sup> J. Jackson, “Art Museums in the Third Grade Reading Curriculum,” *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 6, no. 2 (2014): 153–69.
- <sup>28</sup> Liane Brouillette, “Supporting the Language Development of Limited English Proficient Students through Arts Integration in the Primary Grades,” *Arts Education Policy Review* 113, no. 2 (2012): 68–74.
- <sup>29</sup> Patricia C. Gándara and Frances Contreras, *The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequences of Failed Social Policies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- <sup>30</sup> Rabkin, et al., *A Report on the Teaching Artist Research Project*.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.; Narelle Lemon, Susanne Garvis, and Christopher Klopper, *Representations of Working in Arts Education: Stories of Learning and Teaching* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2014).
- <sup>32</sup> Rabkin et al., *A Report on the Teaching Artist Research Project*.
- <sup>33</sup> Nissa Ingraham and Susanne Nuttall, “The Story of an Arts Integration School on English-Language-Learner Development: A Qualitative Study of Collaboration, Integrity, and Confidence,” *International Journal of Education & the Arts* 17, no. 28 (August 2016): 1–17; Kanevsky, Corke, and Frangkiser, “The Academic Resilience and Psychosocial Characteristics of Inner-City English Learners in a Museum-Based School Program,” 452–475.
- <sup>34</sup> Randi Korn and Associates, “Summary of Results Survey of Single-Visit K–12 Art Museum Programs.”
- <sup>35</sup> “2010–2015, Quest for Excellence,” Compton Unified School District (2010).
- <sup>36</sup> Ingraham and Nuttall, “The Story of an Arts Integration School on English-Language-Learner Development,” 1–17; Rabkin et al., *A Report on the Teaching Artist Research Project*.
- <sup>37</sup> Rabkin et al., *A Report on the Teaching Artist Research Project*.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> David E. Freeman and Yvonne S. Freeman, *Between Worlds: Access to Second Language Acquisition* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinmann, 2011); Cadiero-Kaplan, Lavadenz, and Armas, “Essential Elements of Effective Practices for English Learners.”
- <sup>40</sup> Betancourt and Salazar, “Engaging Latino Audiences,” 181–96; Jackson, “Art Museums in the Third Grade Reading Curriculum,” 153–69.
- <sup>41</sup> David Ebitz, “Qualifications and the Professional Preparation and Development of Art Museum Educators,” *Studies in Art Education* 46, no. 2 (2005): 164.
- <sup>42</sup> Bonnie Baskin, “A Short History of Art Education in America, 1890 to the Present,” *Roundtable Reports* 4, no. 3 (1979): 9.
- <sup>43</sup> Nelson Graburn, “The Museum and the Visitor Experience,” *Roundtable Reports* (Fall 1977): 4.
- <sup>44</sup> Mary Ellen Munley, “Museums as Learning Environments: A Prospectus for a New Century,” *Roundtable Reports* 9, nos. 2–3 (1984): 30.
- <sup>45</sup> Juliet Moore Tapia, “Poking Holes in the Oil Paintings: The Case for Critical Theory in Postmodern Art Museum Education,” *Visual Arts Research* 34, no. 67 (2008): 40.
- <sup>46</sup> Ebitz, “Sufficient Foundation,” 14–24.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> See Tapia, “Poking Holes in the Oil Paintings.”
- <sup>49</sup> See Ebitz, “Sufficient Foundation.”
- <sup>50</sup> Melinda Mayer, “A Postmodern Puzzle: Rewriting the Place of the Visitor in Art Museum Education,” *Studies in Art Education* 46, no. 4 (2005): 30.
- <sup>51</sup> Ebitz, “Sufficient Foundation,” 41.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.

**TAKING IT  
TO THE  
STREETS**

**ENGAGING  
OUR  
NEIGHBORHOOD**

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## KARLEEN GARDNER

Director of Learning Innovation, Minneapolis Institute of Arts

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“Every museum should see itself as a neighborhood museum. If an institution is not accessible to the individuals who must of necessity pass by its portals each day, then it is not truly a public institution.”

—Claudine K. Brown, “The Museum’s Role in a Multicultural Society”<sup>1</sup>

The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) holds a belief in the power of art—and the responsibility of art museums—to spark curiosity and creativity, connect people across cultural differences, and engage our individual and shared values. Museums, with their rich collections that illustrate the creativity and stories of humanity, are well poised to play a vital role in helping people come together in an increasingly connected yet fragmented world. Mia aspires to create positive social change in our neighborhood and beyond by using the power of art to foster empathy and unity among community members.

Over the last two decades, the world of museums and libraries has changed greatly, and many institutions, including Mia, are expanding their thinking and practices regarding their roles in and responsibilities to their communities. A 2015 study conducted by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), which focused on the role cultural organizations can play in community revitalization, found that many museums and libraries are moving from “narrow concerns of patronage and audience development,” to also “embrace[ing] community-building and comprehensive approaches to change” beyond the walls of their institutions.<sup>2</sup> This shift and the ensuing “confluence of values and interests creates opportunities for museums and libraries to magnify their public value by playing a supporting, and sometimes a leading, role in community-wide change efforts.”<sup>3</sup>

This shift in museum ideology, coupled with the mounting research-based evidence on the benefits of the arts for individuals and communities, forms a solid foundation on

which to build high-impact, community-based initiatives. A 2012 National Endowment of the Arts report cites a study conducted by the Urban Institute, which found that within a community (defined in the report as “a collection of people bound by some common element, be it geography, history, an area of interest, or some other shared characteristic”), “engaging in art can foster a sense of identity and belonging.”<sup>4</sup> It goes on to state that art making promotes “communal values such as a tolerance of diversity and an openness to questions. These communal values are ties that bind. At their best, such ties contribute to unity, identity, a sense of solidarity, higher levels of civic engagement, and ultimately the expectation of the right to culture.”<sup>5</sup> These findings are also supported by the University of Chicago’s analysis of data from the General Social Survey, a project that aims to gather data on contemporary American society in order to monitor and explain trends and constants in attitudes, behaviors, and attributes. The study shows strong evidence that the arts enhance civil society, and that participants in the arts are more engaged in civic activities within their communities and have higher levels of social tolerance. Individuals who attend arts events are more likely to participate in various civic associations, exhibit greater tolerance toward people of color and people identifying as LGTBQ, and “behave in a manner which regards the interests of others above those of oneself.”<sup>6</sup>

Mia’s mission is to enrich the community by collecting, preserving, and making accessible outstanding works of art from the world’s diverse cultures. Founded as an educational and civic institution, Mia has a long history of community programming and engaging with people outside our walls through partnerships and by participating in numerous festivals across the Twin Cities. Yet these efforts have often been one-offs (“transactional” exchanges—a one-time program, or a service rendered) rather than sustained, ongoing

## **Genuinely transformational work requires the intention, dedication, and commitment of the entire museum, not just the education department.**

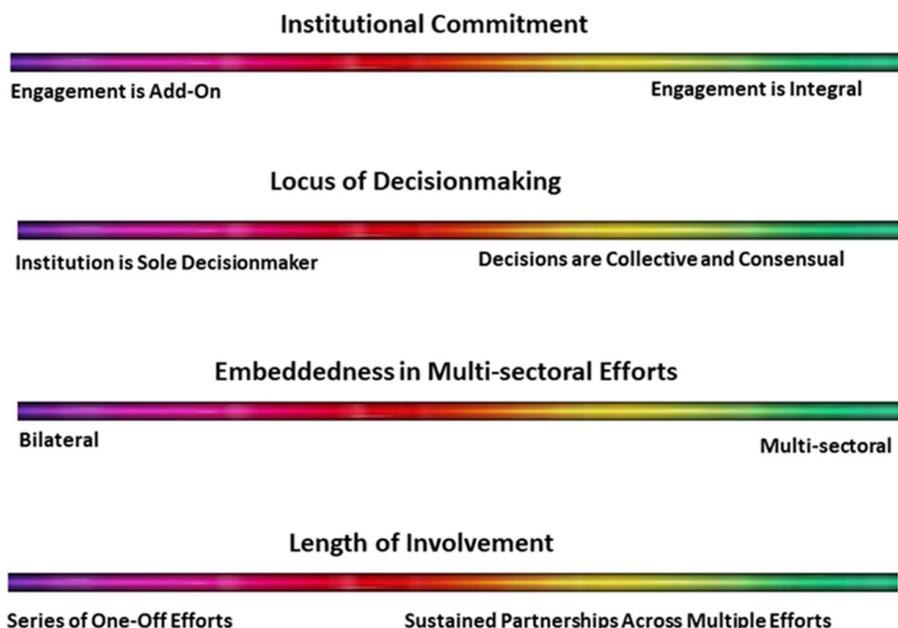
relationships. Also, over the last century, the demographics of the museum’s surrounding neighborhoods have dramatically changed; the area is now home to many immigrant communities, and Mia has not necessarily kept up with these shifts. We recognize that we need to pivot—to be more collaborative with and responsive to the needs of our neighbors.

Since 2012 we have made incremental progress in this work, yet in order to truly make an impact, we know that we need an institution-wide, cross-departmental commitment to effective engagement with our communities. In 2015 Mia celebrated its one-hundredth birthday, and at this time we did some institutional reflection on our practices, programs, and impact. Mia came to the conclusion that we need to be doing more work on this front and doing it differently. As Kaywin Feldman, Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Director and President, said during this conversation, “because we have free admission, and are presumably accessible to everyone, we might have become complacent in truly engaging our diverse communities.” Genuinely transformational work requires the intention, dedication, and commitment of the entire museum, not just the education department.

Our learning innovation team, especially those focused on community engagement, knows that to have greater and continuous impact we need to focus on relationship-building, cocreation, and sustained impact. In January 2016 Mia team members participated in a convening cohosted by the IMLS and LISC in which these organizations shared

**FIG. 1**

Terms for Museum and Library Engagement from *Museums, Libraries and Comprehensive Initiatives: A First Look at Emerging Experience*



the results and recommendations from their collaborative research initiative focused on “finding ways to connect museums and libraries into the broadening practice of comprehensive community revitalization of low-income neighborhoods.”<sup>7</sup> IMLS is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s approximately 123,000 libraries and 35,000 museums, and their mission is “to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement.” The goal of LISC is to “equip struggling communities with the capital, strategy, and know-how to become places where people can thrive.” LISC brings key local players together “to take on pressing challenges and incubate new solutions.”

In their presentation, they shared an image that resonated with our approach to this work and visually articulated what transformational work looks like (fig. 1). In their report on “institutional engagement,” the authors articulate what distinguishes transformational work from the transactional and episodic partnerships that are typical of many institutions. They outline the attributes that characterize this difference:

1. Institutional commitment: community engagement is seen as integral to the organization’s mission, which typically means that the work of multiple departments and program areas foster engagement, supported at the senior executive level and board.
2. Locus of decision making: program design and implementation decisions are shared with community leaders, including representatives of community-based organizations.
3. Embeddedness within community networks: projects or programs (or series of projects or programs) are linked to the activities of multiple others who cooperate to achieve some type of collective impact.
4. Level of effort: significant resources are devoted to the project or program relative to other organizational activities, understood in terms of staff time, budget, and attention by senior managers.
5. Continuation over time: projects or programs that do not end with one-shot efforts, but continue with the same organizations or types of organizations, often within some kind of framework for cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

These attributes and the terms outlined for impactful community engagement initiatives influenced the strategies and goals outlined in Mia2021, the museum's strategic plan for 2016–21. One of the main focus areas of this plan is Engaging Communities, which positions the museum to better serve our audience by responding to the changing demographics of the city to foster our future relevance and sustainability as an institution. Our twenty-first-century communities represent different shared experiences and interests, geographical origins, races, and ethnicities from those of the nineteenth century, when Mia was founded. To be relevant and vital to current and future audiences, Mia must adapt its practices in the following ways: create an inclusive culture, develop internal practices to promote inclusion and equity, and work in collaboration with different communities to identify and address diverse assets, needs, and interests. In this way, Mia will make meaningful connections with our community at large and increase accessibility to the museum and its collections.

It is a strategic priority for our audiences (general visitors, program participants, and students) to better reflect the Twin Cities' demographics by 2021, particularly the racial and ethnic demographics of our immediate area. The Whittier and Phillips neighborhoods are two of the most diverse and economically challenged in Minneapolis, and they represent a population of roughly 34,000, with 44 percent of the population in Whittier and 80 percent in Phillips identifying as Hispanic or Latino, black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian American, or mixed race. In Phillips, 35 percent of the population is foreign born, and in Whittier, 21 percent. The median income in both neighborhoods is approximately one-third of the median income for the entire metropolitan area.<sup>9</sup> Both neighborhoods declined due to middle-class flight to the suburbs after World War II. In the 1960s, the construction of Interstate 35W destabilized the area,

plowing through city blocks, destroying street grids, and severing diverse and established neighborhoods.<sup>10</sup>

While demographics are a focus, Mia also recognizes that communities are not monolithic. We intend to gain a deeper understanding of our visitors' complex and intersectional identities (i.e., understanding how race intersects with gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status) by building relationships with community partners and conducting research and investigating the psychographics, motivations, and interests of members of our identified communities. This understanding will determine how best to approach, work with, and engage these new audiences. Deep, active relationships with the many communities that comprise the audiences we serve are integral to the success of the museum. Mia relies on these relationships for new perspectives and ideas essential to the success of our work. We believe that being an accessible institution makes both the museum and the community we serve stronger and better supported.

We also believe that by concentrating our efforts in a specified location and focusing on specific communities, we will realize greater impact. Yet we know for transformational work to happen we need to take a new approach to developing these partnerships. With a true emphasis on cocreation as the goal, we are focused on finding mutual benefits and initiatives that best serve the community. We must take the long view, and we know that relationship-building requires a lot of time and ongoing dialogue. Rather than going in with our own agenda or project idea, we know that we need to spend quality time with our partners and get to know them, their motivations, interests, and goals, as well as those of their constituents.

Mia began this process by identifying and building relationships with key organizations in our surrounding area. Hope Community

has established a vital presence in these neighborhoods to address area challenges and is known for its visionary integration of neighborhood revitalization and engagement. The organization has become an anchor in Phillips, creating a critical mass of housing and public spaces. Hope has experience and capacity in organizing, building, and supporting community change. Mia's team has begun meeting with Hope's staff to understand their mission and think about how our organizations might work together to engage with and better serve our neighborhood.

One of our first collaborations was Soul Food Monologues, hosted at Mia to celebrate and honor community voices on food justice. The event featured a free public reception and a performance centered on the release of the "Community Food Listening Project Report." Completed by Hope, this report provides insights into what Phillips residents experience as they work to feed and nourish themselves and their families. It serves as a call to action for organizations, funders, policy makers, and others committed to systemic change rooted in community. This program brought diverse community members together in the museum and elevated awareness about Mia's interest in the well-being of the residents in our neighborhood.

Our next partnership with Hope centered on an area that resonates with both organizations—art and social justice. ArtxChange was codeveloped by Mia and Hope staff members. This salon-style series featured local artists who are using their work to create dialogue leading to social change. Group conversations explored how artistic practice can be a civic practice and how the power of art can be a vehicle for initiating transformation in our communities and beyond. This event brought together a diverse audience and fostered rich conversations about how artists and institutions can use art to raise awareness of civic issues and bring about change.

**We believe that being an accessible institution makes both the museum and the community we serve stronger and better supported.**

Another important neighborhood organization that works for change is Centro Tyrone Guzman (Centro), "the oldest and largest multi-service Latino organization in Minneapolis, serving more than 7,000 individuals annually through a holistic array of programs." Their mission is "to contribute to the well-being and full participation of Latinos through education and family engagement." Over the past three years, Mia and Centro have developed a strong connection and have continually found ways to support each other's work and collaborate. In our initial meeting with their team, we discovered much alignment in shared goals, including valuing art and culture.

Our first collaborative program was based on an exhibition and community project hosted by Mia in 2015, the Institute for Figuring's *Crochet Coral Reef Project*. As part of the world's largest participatory art and science project, Mia hosted crochet circles, inviting people to come together to gain knowledge about the project, learn a new technique, and participate in the making of *Minneapolis Satellite Reef*. This was an ideal fit for Centro's Wise Elders Program, which serves a critical, under-addressed need in the community for culturally and linguistically responsive services to support Latino seniors. Numerous members of the group came together for a workshop at Centro, facilitated by Mia staff, for a fun, social art-making experience. Members of the Wise Elders Program contributed their crocheted creations

to the exhibition and made a special field trip to the museum to experience it.

The next opportunity developed around a partnership between Centro and Teatro del Pueblo, an organization that promotes Latino culture through the creation and presentation of performing arts. Both organizations were working together to create a theater production for the Spanish-speaking community about the warning signs of Alzheimer's disease. They needed a venue for the play, and Mia was happy to serve as a host. This proved to be a great way to support our partner, to bring a new audience to Mia, and to show our commitment to providing programming for people with dementia. The next year, these same three organizations collaborated on a Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebration at Mia, and developed a variety of activities for people of all ages, including families. The event brought together diverse audiences and provided an opportunity for social bridging.

During the course of Mia's relationship-building with Hope and Centro, our team was also researching and learning about the benefits and impacts of public art, most notably community murals. A case study published by the University of Massachusetts Boston focusing on mural programs in US cities found that the transformation fostered through their creation "runs deeper than the artistry of the murals; the real works of art are the changes these collaborative projects inspire within communities. Mural projects mobilize communities to articulate dreams, express frustrations, and most importantly, consider strategies for change."<sup>11</sup> We were impressed with the work of Groundswell, an organization in Brooklyn that brings together artists, youth, and community organizations to use art as a tool for social change and for a more just and equitable world. Their mural projects beautify neighborhoods, engage youth in societal and personal transformation, and give expression to ideas and perspectives

**Ultimately, these transformative arts experiences give voice and visibility to neighborhood residents while simultaneously building and growing relationships in underserved communities that will significantly transform the role of the museum for current and future generations.**

that are underrepresented in public dialogue. Groundswell believes that collaborative art making combines the sanctity of personal expression with the strength of community activism—and produces unique and powerful outcomes. Inspired by their success and impact, Mia invited their executive director to Minneapolis to lead a workshop and discussion about starting a mural program. We invited our neighborhood partners to participate, including Centro Tyron Guzman and Hope Community. Hope already had a community mural program in place, and through our collaboration with Groundswell, we decided to expand on this work in Whittier and Phillips.

The jointly established goals for our Community Mural Program are to collaborate with our neighborhood partners and use art as a vehicle for providing opportunities for residents to share their personal, cultural, and community stories; to connect with one another; and to collaborate on public works of art that make visible the multicultural perspectives and unique characteristics of these neighborhoods. Ultimately, these

**FIG. 2**

Community mural  
at Centro Tyrone  
Guzman by  
Guerreras del Norte



transformative arts experiences give voice and visibility to neighborhood residents while simultaneously building and growing relationships in underserved communities that will significantly transform the role of the museum for current and future generations.

Our team developed outcomes for individual participants based on an Australian study conducted by Deidre Williams on the social benefits of art programs: personal development (“participants felt more confident about what they, or groups they were part of, could do”); social cohesion (“even in places where sociability has been almost extinguished by poverty, crime, and mistrust . . . participatory arts has made a difference”); and imagination and vision (“many discovered they could be creative; overcame risks associated with self, identity, ability, and relationships; and tried things they had not done before”).<sup>12</sup>

Working with these goals in mind, we recruited experienced mural artists from the neighborhood and developed the program’s structure and schedule. Our first collaborative project in 2015 was with Centro and the Guerreras del Norte, a group of Latina women from ten different countries. Like many immigrants and refugees, these women left their countries for reasons such as poverty, lack of opportunities for work and education, and fear of gang violence. Many had never created art and were excited about sharing their stories and experiences through a mural. In the process, they visited other murals in the Twin Cities, including those produced by Hope Community; toured the collections at Mia; discussed the role of art in marginalized communities; learned how to mix colors and use paint; shared food and laughter; and discussed what message and vision they, as Latina immigrants, wanted to send through their mural (fig. 2). The participants began to

understand how art can transform people's lives and how to use that strength to seek change and justice for themselves and their communities. Mia compiled some of the women's comments after participating in the program:

- Before, I knew nothing, now I cannot imagine my life without art.
- I didn't know what I was capable of before doing this program.
- I learned to value myself more every day.

Through this program, these women, many of whom did not know one another before, established bonds and commonalities. They continue to convene on a regular basis and visit Mia as a group.

The following summer, Hope and Mia collaborated on two other murals. One of these was also made in partnership with Centro's group Raíces, which offers Latinx teens space and time to spend with their peers in a culturally responsive environment. Raíces youth possess a strong sense of self as multicultural, bilingual individuals who think critically and make positive decisions. The curriculum and schedule of the program were much like that of the Guerreras del Norte's project, yet the discussions about the content of the mural centered on the teens' identities as both Latinx and American, on what they wanted the artwork to say about them as individuals and as a group, and on their cultures and community (fig. 3). Mia compiled some of the youths' comments after completing the mural:



- It's cool that a bunch of teenagers, young people, can do something this big. Even though we are young, we have a voice and we can really do something in our community.
- The mural says lots about our Latino, Hispanic community and culture.
- Painting the mural gave us an opportunity to put ourselves on the wall and show the world who we are.

Our second project was with St. Stephen's Human Services, a nonprofit located adjacent to Mia that offers a variety of services to people experiencing homelessness. The group of adults participating in the program selected a wall on Mia property that faces St. Stephen's and is next to their community

garden, a place they see on a daily basis. The schedule and program activities mirrored those of the other mural projects but with conversations centered on their stories of homelessness, its public perceptions and stereotypes, and participants' dreams and hopes for the future (fig. 4). At the unveiling ceremony on October 10, 2016, one of the participating artists stated, "When I am feeling down, I am going to come and stand in front of our mural. This will remind me of what we are capable of and what is possible."

We have seen both the personal and collective impacts of these transformational programs. We have also developed long-standing relationships with organizations and community members in our neighborhood. Yet there is much more work to be done. We have plans for taking a more holistic approach by



**FIG. 3**

Community mural at Centro Tyrone Guzman by Raíces



**FIG. 4**

Community mural at Mia by artists from St. Stephen's Human Services

enhancing and expanding these initiatives as well as including more partners. These efforts are both rewarding and challenging, especially because this work requires new approaches and models for Mia. To authentically partner and cocreate with other organizations, we must adapt our thinking and internal and external structures accordingly.

An example of this institutional shift occurred early on and is illustrated by some missteps in our fundraising for a comprehensive, three-year project with Hope Community. Although we collaborated in these efforts, Mia ended up taking the lead in writing the funding proposal and, with the best of intentions, we mistakenly framed the project in terms of a deficit-based model rather than an asset-based model. This was the way the museum had worded grant applications for many years, and we made assumptions about what kind of language the funders wanted. This approach was not well received by our partners and the miscommunication bred mistrust. Through numerous conversations, coupled with our willingness to withdraw the grant application, we reestablished trust and developed specific terms for our partnership. As partners, we are equals and should always both be at the table; neither partner should move forward with decision-making unless we have established mutual understanding and agreement. If one of our goals is for Mia to be seen as a valued, trusted community partner and resource, we must model the behavior and values that will earn us this reputation. In hindsight, our honest discussions and willingness to realize our mistake strengthened our relationship with Hope and helped Mia staff become more mindful of the new paradigm in which we are operating.

Prerana Reddy, director of public events at Queens Museum, describes this type of learning process:

Community change is a long-term process. It is not always linear. Sometimes there are two steps back for each step forward. If other museums want to do this intentionally,

they have to understand that it will happen outside usual programming cycles, exhibition cycles, and grant cycles. It must become part of the institutional DNA, and you need specific people with specific skills that often museums don't have. And those people have certain language skills, cultural competencies, social networks, or experiential backgrounds that may be different than what might be expected of a traditional museum professional. . . . The decision to engage in comprehensive efforts is often tied to changes in institutional mission, which are sometimes evolutionary, not an instantaneous pivot. It inevitably requires organizational change and commitment.<sup>13</sup>

Mia is in the nascent stages of this work, and as a learning organization, we acknowledge that we will continue to learn and grow from our mistakes. There are many things we will need to change within our institution if we want to be true community partners and collaboratively initiate change in our neighborhood. ■

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9 Neighborhood profiles of Whittier and Midtown Phillips, mncompass.org, <http://www.mncompass.org/profiles/neighborhoods/minneapolis/whittier>; <http://www.mncompass.org/profiles/neighborhoods/minneapolis/midtown-phillips>.

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**AN EVOLUTION  
OF MOMA  
PROGRAMMING  
FOR OLDER  
ADULTS**

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## LAUREL HUMBLE

Associate Educator, Community, Access, and School Programs, Museum of Modern Art

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Irene, a native Brooklynite in her mid-seventies, studied art at Pratt Institute but worked her entire career in the health-care industry. Throughout her working life she never picked up a pencil or paintbrush; it was not until she retired in 2006 that she very slowly began to rekindle her interest in art—taking studio classes, attending art-history lectures, and visiting museums across the city. Irene recently reflected on this transformation in her life: “I always heard that one needs a passion in life to be fulfilled. Now I am on a personal voyage to see, create, and learn as much as I can in my later years.”<sup>1</sup>

Irene regularly attends Prime Time programming for city residents ages sixty-five and older at the Museum of Modern

Art (MoMA) in New York. Through Prime Time my colleagues and I in the museum’s education department seek to contribute to a fulfilling aging process, one defined by curiosity, connectedness, creativity, and continued growth. The initiative has allowed us to develop a deeper appreciation of our city’s older adult population and to take stock of the ways in which this portion of our audience has and has not engaged with the museum historically. In turn, we have rethought our offerings in order to better reach and connect with the city’s diverse—and growing—older adult communities.<sup>2</sup> In this essay I will detail the origins and evolution of our work with older New Yorkers as well as our efforts to consider this audience anew.

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Prime Time was developed by Francesca Rosenberg, director for community, access, and school programs; Carrie McGee, assistant director for community and access programs; and myself. In their respective twenty-three and fifteen years at the Museum of Modern Art, Rosenberg and McGee have advocated for individuals with disabilities and other marginalized communities within the museum, and established a robust array of programming for these audiences. Their work enables the museum to serve over twenty thousand people annually through community and access programs. Prime Time would not have been possible without the incredible foundation forged by Rosenberg and McGee, and it has flourished thanks to their ingenuity, fortitude, and dedication to making art and museums accessible to people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.

**FIG. 1**

Meet Me at MoMA participants discuss work by Henri Matisse.



Older adults are represented among MoMA's visitors, volunteers, collection artists, trustees, and participants in educational programs (both in-person and online). The museum has a long history of providing targeted on- and off-site programs for older New Yorkers, with teleconference courses for homebound individuals dating back to 1992 and special access hours for older adults offered as early as 1997.<sup>3</sup> In recognition of the increasing prevalence of Alzheimer's disease (AD) and other forms of dementia, in 2003 my colleagues Francesca Rosenberg and Carrie McGee piloted programming for individuals with Alzheimer's disease in collaboration with assisted-living facilities and support groups. In 2006 they launched Meet Me at MoMA, a gallery-based discussion program for individuals with early- to mid-stage AD (the majority of whom live at home) and their family members and/or professional care partners (fig. 1). Meet Me at MoMA continues on a monthly basis, with multiple groups of roughly ten to twelve people exploring an exhibition or part of the

collection through facilitated discussion. During these tours professional artists and educators ask questions that prompt close looking and sharing of observations, interpretations, and personal opinions. They weave together participants' comments and introduce relevant art-historical information that contextualizes the conversation. The program allows all participants to engage socially and intellectually, exploring a common interest in art within a supportive group of their peers. Similarly, our continued work with individuals living in skilled-nursing facilities fosters opportunities for creativity and social connection within an institutional care setting.

The social component of Meet Me at MoMA was underscored by a formal evaluation conducted by the Center of Excellence for Brain Aging and Dementia at New York University (NYU).<sup>4</sup> Dr. Mary Mittelman and her team recruited individuals with a diagnosis of early-stage AD to attend Meet Me at MoMA with a family care partner, and

they examined the impact of the program on each participant's quality of life as well as on their shared relationship. Their findings were quite positive overall—participants reported improved mood, individuals with dementia reported an elevation in their sense of self-esteem, and care partners reported fewer emotional issues following the program. One finding in particular that we thought to be both surprising and affirming was that care partners reported an increase in their sense of social support, which is to say that they felt they could rely on more people day-to-day for assistance.<sup>5</sup> One can identify these moments of social connectedness during a group program—participants smile, nod, and laugh at peoples' comments; they listen and build off one another's ideas; they share personal information—but NYU's findings demonstrated how the effects of those connections carry over in the days following the museum visit. The study validated our previously anecdotal evidence indicating that engagement with art in a group setting can maintain social bonds or even prompt new ones, even as individuals are confronting the isolation, anxiety, and other potential challenges that can follow a diagnosis of AD. The NYU evaluation was conducted under the auspices of the MoMA Alzheimer's Project. This multiyear initiative, generously funded by MetLife Foundation, allowed us to develop and disseminate resources for museums, health professionals, and individual care partners on making art accessible to people with dementia on a grand scale.<sup>6</sup> Over the 7-year course of the project, my colleagues and I facilitated over 150 workshops in 25 states and 17 countries, and connected with over 375 museums and 13,000 people. Through this large-scale outreach effort, we became embedded within the larger field of creativity and aging, were introduced to important research on the benefits of lifelong learning and engagement with art in later life, and connected with colleagues who offer arts programs for individuals with AD and older adults more broadly across the United

States and internationally. As we gained inspiration from this group of like-minded colleagues, and as funding for the MoMA Alzheimer's Project neared its end, we were poised to channel our growing expertise into programming for a wider swath of the older adult population in New York City.<sup>7</sup>

## Engagement with art in a group setting can maintain social bonds or even prompt new ones.

Prior to developing new programming, however, we undertook a comprehensive research effort to learn more about this dynamic group, challenges they face, programs and services available to them, and the role of art in their lives. Our investigation drew not only on the expertise of local, national, and international arts practitioners, but also, more importantly, foregrounded the perspectives of local older adults, including MoMA volunteers and visitors, as well as colleagues in the field of aging services. We adopted a three-pronged approach: a review of existing scientific research on older New Yorkers and Americans; meetings with colleagues from aging services and cultural organizations around the city who work with older adults of varying backgrounds; and a research project wherein a select group of older residents, called the Prime Time Collective, took part in and provided feedback on the museum's existing educational offerings.

The Prime Time Collective—composed of eleven older New Yorkers who live independently, originally ages sixty-one to ninety-three—was integral in developing the structure and ethos of Prime Time as a whole. In convening the collective, we strove to recruit individuals who were diverse in terms of

age, race, ethnic background, income level, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, and level of familiarity with art, museums, and MoMA specifically. During fall 2014 collective members took part in various MoMA educational programs, including gallery sessions, on-site studio and art history classes, online courses, and more. Participants articulated their desire to take part in regularly scheduled, participatory programs that are inclusive and social in nature through written evaluations and conversations held in focus groups. They wanted to engage actively with new ideas, materials, and processes, and to connect with other people with similar interests (particularly other adult learners) in a welcoming, comfortable environment. They also identified issues that might prevent them and their peers from participating at MoMA or other cultural institutions—including financial, physical, informational, and attitudinal barriers.

While the collective was small in number, they provided helpful insights into the experiences of a growing population, older adults in New York City. As of 2010 there were nearly 1.4 million individuals ages sixty or older living across the five boroughs, constituting 17 percent of the city's population.<sup>8</sup> The vast majority of older Americans live at home; only 3 percent of individuals sixty-five and older live in skilled-nursing facilities.<sup>9</sup> Given these statistics, it was essential that our outreach not be limited to long-term care settings. Conversations with colleagues in aging services further contributed to our understanding of this diverse and diffuse population, including the fact that immigrants make up 46 percent of the older adult population in the city.<sup>10</sup> These colleagues represent various organizations—such as settlement homes, peer-to-peer senior companion programs, naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCS), and supportive single-room occupancy residences (SROs)—the majority of which serve older adults with significant financial constraints

and/or mobility issues. Their clients might have difficulty using public transportation (particularly if they have to travel long distances or are traveling after dark), often do not have Internet access and/or a computer at home, qualify for government assistance and/or entitlements, and are potentially at risk for social isolation as a result of physical limitations and/or loss of friends and family.

Research has shown that older adults have ample free time but do not necessarily participate in institutions that provide regular social interaction, such as employment, cohabitation, and/or marriage. More than 70 percent of New Yorkers over sixty are not employed or seeking employment.<sup>11</sup> Of New Yorkers sixty-five and older, 56 percent are unmarried (either never married, widowed, divorced, or separated).<sup>12</sup> Nearly 30 percent of New Yorkers ages sixty and older live alone.<sup>13</sup> The New York City Department for Health and Mental Hygiene reported that approximately 140,000 older New Yorkers are at risk for social isolation.<sup>14</sup> The NYU evaluation illustrated how engagement with art can have a positive impact on well-being and combat social isolation among Meet Me at MoMA participants, a finding that can be applied to older adults more broadly.

After coming to appreciate the incredible diversity of New York's older adult population, we identified ways that our work could support various aging services and began to forge important connections that have since evolved into in-depth partnerships. Most importantly, it became clear that a successful programming initiative could not take a one-size-fits-all approach; rather, in collaboration with community-based organizations, case managers, artists, physicians, social workers, and participants, we would need to develop different kinds of experiences that catered to older adults' varying needs, interests, and circumstances. Accordingly, we formulated three programming areas: first, regularly scheduled



FIG. 2

Prime Timers process around the block as part of our May 2015 launch event.

public programs open to any New Yorker ages sixty-five and older; second, tailor-made partnerships with select aging-services organizations that are offered on a long-term basis; and third, opportunities for museum visits and short-term, off-site programs available upon request to any aging-services organization across the five boroughs.

In May 2015 we celebrated the public launch of Prime Time, offering discounted membership and admission to older New Yorkers throughout Older Americans Month and one day of free admission and

programming for all older visitors. We announced Prime Time online via social and news media, and on-site by a procession of Prime Timers who, accompanied by an intergenerational band, marched around the block and into the museum's lobby and sculpture garden (fig. 2). This public celebration enabled us to build an initial audience base of independent older New Yorkers, and from there we began piloting different types of public programs for Prime Timers with varying interests, learning styles, and schedules.

Our 2015–16 Prime Time calendar involved a combination of one- and two-part programs that took place in gallery, studio, and theater settings, either in the morning, afternoon, or evening. During this pilot period our audience grew enormously—there were approximately 250 people on our mailing list following the May launch event; that number grew to 700 by December 2015 and over 1,000 by June 2016. Our audience has expanded primarily through word of mouth. We now offer one Prime Time public program per month, and these programs routinely register to capacity with 120 or more people plus an extensive waiting list.

Current monthly Prime Time offerings include gallery conversations, wherein multiple groups of up to fifteen participants explore a special exhibition, artist, movement, or other theme within the MoMA collection through facilitated group dialogues (which are quite similar in structure and tone to Meet Me at MoMA discussions); one-off studio workshops that foster exploration of materials and processes utilized by artists whose work is on display at the museum (fig. 3); and film

**We have cultivated a committed community of learners with a shared interest as well as a desire to create and contribute.**

screenings, which are followed by a discussion led by a MoMA educator and a film curator. In addition, we offer an annual Prime Time Summer Camp—a dynamic week of multipart discussion- and studio-based programming that takes place at the museum and around the city—which can accommodate more than 200 participants, and allows for in-depth engagement. Across all of these programs, we encourage participants to express their ideas and opinions (through both talking about and making art) and build individual and collective understandings about modern and contemporary art. As such, we have cultivated a committed community of learners with a shared interest as well as a desire to create and contribute.

**FIG. 3**

One Prime Timer captures a moment of city life through a smartphone photography workshop.



**FIG. 4**

Prime Timers view and discuss a collaborative piece made through partnership with Neighborhood Self-help by Older Persons Project, on display at MoMA in 2016.



In addition to regularly offering public Prime Time events, we have grown our partnership programming in order to reach a larger contingent of the older adult population and to support the work of our colleagues in aging services. These partnerships entail work with senior centers, particularly those serving marginalized groups, including LGBTQ and immigrant communities (fig. 4). By allying with libraries, meals-on-wheels programs, and other local organizations, we have also expanded our tele- and video-conference programs for individuals unable to leave their homes. Catherine Li, who coordinated DOROT’s University Without Walls, noted how “the high quality programming the MoMA offers through our teleconference and online programs connects older adults that enjoy learning about art and reminds them

that they are still a valued participant in the NYC arts and cultural community.”<sup>15</sup>

Some of our newer programming emerged from collaborations with supportive SROs and other senior residences that serve low-income older adults who have experienced homelessness, have a history of substance abuse or other mental health issues, and/or are living with a HIV/AIDS or another chronic condition. These buildings provide free or affordable housing and services that help adults age actively and independently. Jerald Frampton, director of the Art Project at Odyssey House, an organization that offers housing and treatment for adults with a history of homelessness and addiction, described the effects of arts programming on older residents:

Our Eldercare people derive the deepest benefit from the MoMA programs. They take these visits very seriously—as more than field trips or diversions. They have fun, yet bring a formality to the occasion. They value being treated as adults with valuable insights to offer, worthy of respect. MoMA educators make sure the museum experience is not intimidating and is free from judgments. This atmosphere frees each individual from self-consciousness, and makes it safe to take risks by asking questions and sharing thoughts. They are patient and curious when presented with new concepts and difficult artworks. I think they experience education as a joy rather than a job.<sup>16</sup>

Frampton's statement highlights an objective of all Prime Time programming—to validate participants' unique insights and ideas. While this goal is important for any participant, it is particularly crucial for individuals who have experienced discrimination or been marginalized by cultural institutions and society at large. In addition to our work with SROs and other senior residences, we also coordinate with our colleagues at these organizations to arrange advanced registration for residents to participate in other Prime Time programs, thus enabling them to engage with the museum independently.

Finally, another new type of partnership is modeled in part on social prescribing, which is gaining traction in the United Kingdom. There, medical professionals refer individuals (many of whom are older) to cultural and/or other recreational programs as a formal component of their medical care.<sup>17</sup> Translating this model to the US health-care system, we work with bereavement counselors, social workers, and psychologists—based within geriatric practices, palliative care programs, and hospice services—to refer independent older adults at risk for social isolation or who have recently lost a loved one to a weekly

gallery discussion program. When the sessions finish, individuals can elect to join the Prime Time mailing list in order to maintain their involvement with the museum and fellow participants.

In the last two years we have tapped into a hungry audience of curious and engaged older New Yorkers. Nearly 4,000 older New Yorkers took part in Prime Time programs in our most recent programming year. While significant, these numbers represent only a fraction of this audience's potential and highlight the fact that, despite the significant resources we have dedicated to expanding this program area, we alone cannot possibly meet the growing demand. Accordingly, we work with our colleagues in the education department to eliminate barriers to participation in other MoMA offerings, which connect Prime Timers with visitors of all ages. So far, we have provided full Prime Time scholarships for costly MoMA classes and complimentary tickets for select panel discussions and symposia, and have piloted outreach to Prime Timers with customized communications about other free or low-cost programs at the museum and online. Many recommendations are made on a more casual, ad hoc basis, with MoMA educators sharing information organically as it comes up during Prime Time sessions. As with any targeted outreach strategy, we are wary of siloing this audience and hope that Prime Time can serve as an entrée to the museum's plethora of programs and events.

We must acknowledge, however, the characteristics that set older New Yorkers apart from advantaged young and middle-aged adults and appreciate those characteristics not as deficits but as important differences. Through Prime Time we actively work to address the inequities experienced by older New Yorkers and to counteract the barriers to cultural participation that they experience. While our purview is limited to educational programming and events, we

hope that by increasing the visibility of older adults at the museum, amplifying their voices, and advocating internally on their behalf, we can help our MoMA colleagues to be more inclusive of people of various ages and abilities in their work. Training workshops for frontline staff teach ways to better engage, serve, and value older visitors, and topics related to the older adult experience are regularly discussed at MoMA's accessibility task force meetings.<sup>18</sup> This internal advocacy effort to make the museum more age-friendly further enables Prime Timers to engage with MoMA's collection, exhibitions, and broader community.

Prime Time is our means of contributing to a larger movement to create a more age-friendly society. While museums cannot address all the diverse needs of older adults, cultural institutions can have a positive impact on their overall quality of life by fostering a sense of well-being, connectedness to others, purpose, and value through engagement with art. We hope that through this work MoMA can support members of our community as they age and, in turn, serve as an example to other cultural institutions around the world.

Aging is a fact of life, yet we often ignore this inevitability as it pertains to ourselves. Museum professionals are by default working-age adults; accordingly we must draw on older adults' experiences to properly understand their circumstances. We must work to offer them opportunities to participate within our institutions to the extent to which they desire, and invite them and their proxies to shape our approach. This is not an act of altruism; doing so will help to develop an infrastructure within cultural institutions that supports learners across the life span, which will of course, one day, include ourselves. Thus, it behooves us to consider the world in which we want to grow old and the ways we want to stay engaged as we continue to age. ■

- 1 Irene Porges, online survey response submitted March 23, 2017.
- 2 "Census 2010: Changes in the Elderly Population in New York City, 2000–2010," New York City Department for the Aging (2012), 3. According to this report, the city's sixty-plus population has been growing at a rate of 12.4 percent, compared to a 2.1 percent growth rate for the city's total population.
- 3 Francesca Rosenberg, Amir Parsa, Laurel Humble, and Carrie McGee, eds., *Meet Me: Making Art Accessible to People with Dementia* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 26–30.
- 4 Mary Mittelman and Cynthia Epstein, "Research," in *Meet Me*, 87–105. This chapter constitutes the executive report for the NYU evaluation of Meet Me at MoMA.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 92. This self-rating scale asked family care partners to indicate the number of people to whom they felt close and about their level of satisfaction with social support. Responses given directly before the program, compared to those given eight days later, increased by an average of 2.38, from 7 to 9.38 people.
- 6 The MoMA Alzheimer's Project: Making Art Accessible to People with Dementia was made possible thanks to a generous grant from MetLife Foundation and ran from 2007 to 2014. I initially joined the community and access programs team in 2007 to work on this outreach project.
- 7 MetLife Foundation funding for the MoMA Alzheimer's Project came to an end in 2014, which curtailed our broader outreach efforts. However, Meet Me at MoMA and other programming for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and their care partners remain an integral part of our departmental offerings. We serve roughly 1,000 individuals with dementia and their care partners every year.
- 8 "Profile of Older New Yorkers," New York City Department for the Aging (2013), 1.
- 9 United States Census Bureau, *65+ in the United States: 2010* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2014), 3.
- 10 Christian González-Rivera, *The New Face of New York's Seniors* (New York: Center for an Urban Future, 2013), 3.
- 11 "Profile of Older New Yorkers," 6.
- 12 Jennifer M. Norton, Leze Nicaj, Laura DiGrande, Catherine Stayton, Carolyn Olson, and Bonnie Kerker, "Health of Older New Yorkers. NYC," *NYC Vital Signs* 8, no. 4 (2010): 1.
- 13 "Profile of Older New Yorkers," 4.
- 14 Norton et al., "Health of Older New Yorkers," 2.
- 15 Catherine Li, e-mail message to author, June 8, 2017.
- 16 Jerald Frampton, e-mail message to author, June 12, 2017.
- 17 Katharine Langford, Peter Baeck, and Martha Hampson, *More than Medicine: New Services for People Powered Health* (London: Nesta, 2013), 8–13.
- 18 MoMA's accessibility task force is comprised of staff from across the institution, including the departments of operations, finance, human resources, general counsel, information technology, digital media, graphic design, visitor engagement, exhibition design and planning, curatorial, and education.

**BEING  
EXPLICIT  
CREATING SPACE  
BY AND FOR  
LGBTQ+ YOUTH  
OF COLOR**

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## LINDSAY CATHERINE HARRIS

Teen Programs Manager, Brooklyn Museum

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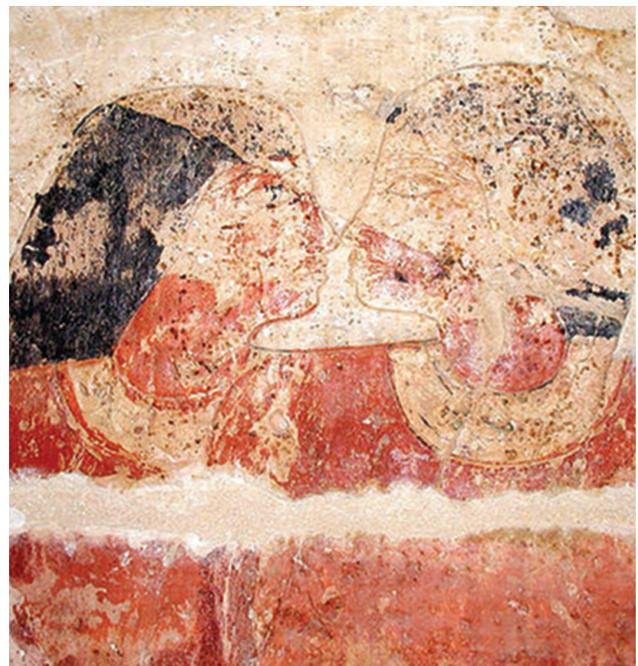
Recent political events in the United States serve as potent reminders that those with nondominant gender, sexual, and racial identities continue to be discriminated against, denied rights, and targeted as victims of individual and mass violence. In 2016 the mass shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, was a painful public display of this reality for many who are marginalized across identities.<sup>1</sup> While increasingly progressive and protective laws enacted under President Barack Obama led some to feel slightly more safe to be openly LGBTQ+<sup>2</sup> in the United States, these sentiments have been replaced with uncertainty and fear as a result of President Donald Trump's policy changes during his first year in office, such as rolling back the Obama-era protections for transgender students in schools, signing an executive order banning transgender troops from the military, and appointing cabinet members and a Supreme Court justice who have been outspoken opponents of gay marriage and LGBTQ antidiscrimination efforts.<sup>3</sup>

What is the role of museums in the struggle for protections, freedoms of expression, and safety for non-heterosexual, non-cisgender people? Is there an opportunity—or even a responsibility—for cultural institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum to champion these communities?

As sites for cultural production, education, expression, and the preservation of history, museums have an incredible amount of influence. They can challenge or even alter visitors' understandings of race, gender, and sexuality; can foster community, creativity, and joy grounded in identity and self-expression; and can advocate for safer, more inclusive communities. Encyclopedic museums like the Brooklyn Museum, which contain objects from five thousand years ago to the present day, have a responsibility to the creators of these objects both past and present but also bear an even greater responsibility to our contemporary public. As such, I believe it is the duty of the museum as a holder of knowledge, culture, and values

to be responsive to the moment, reflective of itself and its communities, and committed to continually rewriting its own archive as an archive of its people. We must serve the living and hold dear humanity. Many museums in the United States were founded under discriminatory laws that legalized slavery, segregation, and more, but as society pushes to correct itself, museums can and should lead the charge. As an American mixed black queer woman, artist, educator, and activist, I hope to contribute to that legacy of art and museology and make this world safer for and more supportive of myself and my communities.

There are several factors that complicate accurate statistics about LGBTQ people. As the National LGBTQ Task Force notes, inclusion of sexual identities and nonbinary genders (beyond male or female) on the US Census has been an ongoing struggle.<sup>4</sup> In 2015 the National Center for Transgender Equality conducted the “U.S. Transgender Survey” (USTS), the largest survey examining the experiences of transgender people eighteen years of age and older in the United States, with 27,715 respondents.<sup>5</sup> In 2016 the Williams Institute conducted a national survey of LGBT statistics<sup>6</sup> that states that LGBT people eighteen years of age and older make up 4.5 percent of the population of New York state. While limited statistics for New York City were found (in these and other surveys), the Williams Institute found that LGBT people eighteen years of age and older make up 10.8 percent of the population of Washington, DC; it is likely that New York City would have a similar, if not higher percentage. These numbers are increasing each year, with a greater percentage of the population reporting. Pediatricians and child development experts have widely reported a growing number of gender nonconforming children.<sup>7</sup> According to one such account, “The number of children aged ten or under who have been referred to the NHS [National Health Service, United Kingdom] because of transgender feelings has more than quadrupled in five years.”<sup>8</sup>



**FIG. 1**

Mastaba (tomb) of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep. Egyptian. 2450 BCE

Given these statistics, it may seem like LGBTQ identities are unique to contemporary society. That is far from accurate. Indigenous cultures of North America have historically recognized more than two genders, as exemplified in the Native American gender tradition contemporarily defined as “two spirit.”<sup>9</sup> In Ancient Egypt, around 2450 BCE, a same-gender couple—Khnumhotep and Niankhkhnum, Egyptian royal servants in the Palace of King Nyuserre—were buried together in the same tomb with paintings and inscriptions depicting their romantic partnership (fig. 1).<sup>10</sup> In the United States, histories and statistics of LGBTQ people have been rarely documented, and for centuries it has been unsafe to claim LGBTQ identity publically or to challenge society’s gender and sexual norms. Just as the US census did not account for multiracial identities until 2000<sup>11</sup>—despite a long

history of interracial unions, voluntarily or otherwise—acknowledgement of research surrounding the many LGBTQ communities that currently exist and have historically existed and contributed to US culture has been lacking.

Furthermore, for many LGBTQ people, remaining closeted or underground has been a radical act of survival. According to the Human Rights Campaign’s national report “Growing up LGBT in America,” 92 percent of LGBT youth report hearing negative messages about being LGBT, mainly through school, the Internet, and their peers.<sup>12</sup> As LGBTQ activists, such as actress Laverne Cox; LGBTQ TV shows, such as *Modern Family*; and perspectives on gender fluidity and variance from such celebrities as Jaden Smith and Amandla Stenberg become increasingly visible in mainstream media, more young people understand and vocalize their own identities at earlier ages. This exposure also helps non-LGBTQ identified people understand and accept identities different from their own. As Karen Scarpella, executive director and program director for the Gender Identity Center of Colorado, Denver, notes, “There are these adults who say, ‘I knew when I was three or four [about my gender variance], but I couldn’t tell anyone. That was made very clear to me.’ But now we’re in a society that allows more gender-bending, and we can express ourselves more.”<sup>13</sup>

A society that does not love and protect its most vulnerable has failed. Without supportive homes, schools, community spaces, art, media, and politics, young people struggle. LGBTQ youth are one of the most susceptible populations to violence and marginalization. According to PFLAG NYC, LGBTQ teens are 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide and 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression compared to their peers. Additionally, studies indicate that between 25 and 50 percent of homeless youth are LGBTQ and are

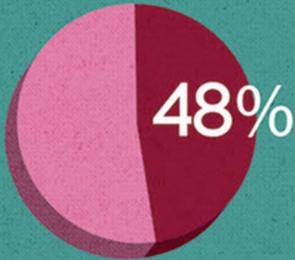
## **Museums are crucial participants of this conversation because they are not only institutions of influence but also archives of human experience.**

experiencing homelessness because of their families’ intolerance of their sexual or gender identity.<sup>14</sup> Let us not forget that we all carry multiple identities, and LGBTQ folks are also people of color, immigrants, differently abled, and incarcerated or formerly incarcerated, among other marginalized identities or experiences. While young people are at the greatest risk, LGBTQ people of all ages experience high rates of sexual violence, poverty, discrimination, harassment, suicide, and depression (fig. 2). This is no greater exemplified than in the tragic killings—in 2017, the most ever reported to date—of transgender people in the United States, nearly all of whom are transgender women of color.<sup>15</sup>

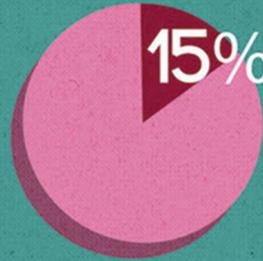
Museums are crucial participants of this conversation because they are not only institutions of influence but also archives of human experience. The Leslie-Lohman Museum for Gay and Lesbian Art in New York and the GLBT History Museum in San Francisco, for example, are critical to preserving and celebrating LGBTQ identities when very little has been documented throughout history. New York, known for its spirit of tolerance and its diversity, has long been a magnet for LGBTQ people. From Andy Warhol to feminist artist Harmony Hammond and Harlem Renaissance painter Beauford Delaney, LGBTQ people have made major contributions to the cultural landscape of twentieth-century New York and contemporary American art. Jean-Michel Basquiat, who as a child was a “junior member” of the Brooklyn Museum,

# QUEER YOUTH OF COLOR

1 IN 3 LGBTQ PEOPLE IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS PEOPLE OF COLOR.



OF LGBTQ STUDENTS OF COLOR EXPERIENCED VERBAL HARASSMENT BECAUSE OF BOTH THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND THEIR RACE OR ETHNICITY.



HAVE BEEN PHYSICALLY HARASSED OR ASSAULTED BASED ON BOTH OF THESE ASPECTS OF THEIR IDENTITY.

13%

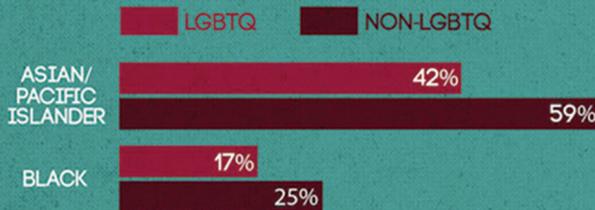
MORE LIKELY FOR BLACK LGBTQ YOUTH TO BE SENT TO DETENTION OR SUSPENDED, THAN NON-BLACK LGBTQ YOUTH

IN THEIR MIDDLE OR HIGH SCHOOL YEARS...



OF LGBTQ YOUTH OF COLOR REPORTED THAT THEY HAD INTERACTIONS WITH SECURITY OR LAW ENFORCEMENT, COMPARED TO 63% OF WHITE LGBTQ YOUTH.

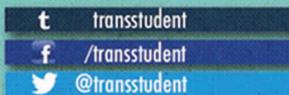
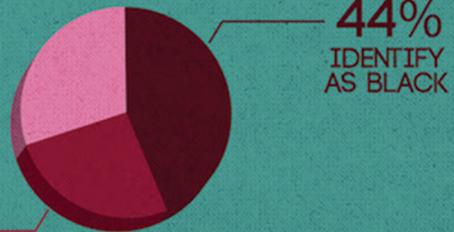
## COLLEGE COMPLETION RATES



20-40% OF ALL HOMELESS YOUTH ARE LGBTQ

AMONG THEM...

26% IDENTIFY AS LATINO



FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO [TRANSSTUDENT.ORG/GRAPHICS](http://TRANSSTUDENT.ORG/GRAPHICS)



movement advancement project



Trans Student Educational Resources

INFOGRAPHIC BY LANDYN PAN

SOURCES: GALLUP.COM, GLSEN, LAMBDA LEGAL, THE WILLIAMS INSTITUTE, AND CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

influenced hip-hop, punk, Neo-Expressionism, and street art in ways that live on today. He also challenged race, gender, and sexual norms, in experiences that are not often talked about. These include his “very rich multichromatic sexuality,” as described in *Widow Basquiat*,<sup>16</sup> and his queerness extending

**FIG. 2**

Queer Youth of Color. Infographic by Landyn Pan

beyond documented relationships with men, as explored in the 2016 panel discussion “Basquiat and Contemporary Queer Art” at the Schomburg Center for Research in

Black Culture.<sup>17</sup> These artists’ identities and histories—while often hidden during their lifetimes—are examples of the creative impact LGBTQ youth have had on the cultural fabric of New York. In 2017 the Museum of the City of New York organized the groundbreaking exhibition and companion publication *Gay Gotham: Art and Underground Culture in New York*, “uncovering the lost history of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender artists in New York City.” As the exhibition catalogue notes, “*Gay Gotham* brings to life the countercultural artistic communities that sprang up over the last hundred years, a creative class whose radical ideas would determine much of modern culture.”<sup>18</sup> When society tells LGBTQ people that being themselves—expressing their gender or sexuality—is deviant or wrong, it is exhibitions like this that play an important role in debunking discriminatory notions by demonstrating and celebrating the contributions of past experiences and expressions, while also providing a history book for understanding the legacy of LGBTQ communities.

I believe the Brooklyn Museum is positioned extremely well to be a leader in the field in this capacity. With the creation of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art in 2007, the Brooklyn Museum became the only encyclopedic museum to include a feminist art gallery within its walls. The museum’s programs and exhibitions are

organized through a critical and intersectional feminist lens. This pushes interpretations of the entire museum’s collection and special exhibitions to reimagine gender as it is represented in the collecting and exhibition of non-cisgender (white) male artists, and of subject matter exploring themes of difference, social activism, representation, intersectionality, subjectivity, women’s history, queer history, non-Eurocentric history, and so on. As a large, encyclopedic museum situated outside Manhattan and led by a series of progressive directors, the museum has been historically empowered to push the envelope in ways that might be more difficult for other museums with a broader tourist public and a more fiscally and socially conservative board of trustees.

I also believe that when an encyclopedic art museum hosts LGBTQ-specific programming and exhibitions, especially teen programs, it helps to push forward internal staffing and policy equity as well. The programs at the Brooklyn Museum—some of which I will outline here—have come from the passions of many LGBTQ staff (including myself), strong allies, and colleagues who have advocated for programming and initiatives to push for greater gender and sexual inclusion beyond exhibitions. Some examples of these efforts include changing the signage on one of our public restrooms to be “all gender,” spearheaded by Sam Kelly, former senior museum educator, in 2016; a series of talks and workshops in which parents and children explore gender identity, designed by Adjoa Jones de Almeida, director of education; programs that consistently highlight queer and transgender artists designed by Lauren A. Zelaya, assistant curator of public programs; and research on gender inclusion and sexual diversity in the museum by education fellows Conor Vaughn in 2015 and Lena Sawyer in 2016, to name a few. Museums must respond to the needs of their communities, and strong teen programs are one way of doing that.

In 2015 I began my role as the Astor Teen Programs Coordinator, a newly created, grant-funded position, to envision and implement two new teen programs: Digital Artizens (a digital feminist project) and the LGBTQ Teen Night Planning Committee (TNPC), the first of its kind at any museum. Grounded in years of work, the LGBTQ TNPC was based largely on the successes of an LGBTQ Teen Night in 2012; the Teen Night Planning Committee, a paid internship opportunity for teens that began in 2010; and the passions, interests, and experiences of former teen programs coordinators Becky Alemán and Cheri Ehrlich.

## Museums must respond to the needs of their communities, and strong teen programs are one way of doing that.

In 2011 Ehrlich began organizing the museum's first Teen Night geared specifically toward LGBTQ teens and their allies. This event came about in connection with the exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* and at the suggestion of the museum's former director, Arnold Lehman, but it was also grounded in years of advocacy. Ehrlich's interest in representing sexual identity in teen programs is rooted in her background in women's studies and third-wave feminism, her experiences in schools and institutions that directly or indirectly dismissed concerns about teen sexuality, and her experiences working with non-LGBTQ teens who often reperformed homophobic behaviors learned from adults and from cultural messages from such sources as music videos and religious practices. Ehrlich found that the young people she had been working with, especially in programs rooted in feminism and women's studies, didn't always

know how to be inclusive and understanding of gender and sexual diversity: "I think it took this first courageous step to make museum programs specific and make it 'okay' to focus on sexuality. Before, it was too controversial, too touchy, too explicit to talk to teens about sexuality in a teen program in a museum, almost like it was too much of an 'adult' topic."<sup>19</sup> The resulting LGBTQ Teen Night was a collaboration led by Ehrlich with several other museum staff members and the photojournalism project *We Are the Youth*, which chronicles stories of LGBTQ youth in the United States.

Building on the success of LGBTQ Teen Night, by 2013 the groundwork was laid for an ongoing LGBTQ Teen Night and paid LGBTQ TNPC internship program. At that time the opportunity to apply for the Brooke Astor Fund for New York City Education arose, and Alemán proposed that one of the newly funded programs be the LGBTQ TNPC. It would be similar to our existing paid teen internship program, which focused on planning Teen Night and public programs by and for teens, but this committee would be open only to LGBTQ youth with the intention of planning a teen night for other LGBTQ youth and allies. As Alemán recalls: "Because there was precedence for this, I was able to dream about a program for LGBTQ young folks where they would have time and resources to plan events for other young folks that might want or need a social space that's creative and nonjudgmental. Also, for me, as a queer educator of color, I knew I would be fairly equipped to develop this program and I trusted close colleagues who I knew would contribute to a culture of love and equity within the education division of the museum. I was also thinking about safe spaces and brave spaces at the time and felt like LGBTQ folks needed a space to be young, creative, and social, especially since queer nightlife

### FIG. 3

A theory of change put forth by the Brooklyn Museum's LGBTQ TNPC

## Being Explicit: Creating Space by and for LGBTQ+ Youth of Color

	Current Situation	Activities	Outputs & Outcomes	
Teens	LGBTQ Teens from <b>marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds</b> lack paid opportunities for skills development (e.g.: internships are typically unpaid)	Provide a paid internship (30 hours at minimum wage) for LGBTQ Teens (including gender non-conforming and two-spirit identified teens)	LGBTQ Teens make new friends and form a cohesive group that encourages individual growth	LGBTQ Teens are less socially isolated/more socially connected and have greater self-efficacy
	LGBTQ Teens lack necessary social and peer support related to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression	Two-hour weekly meetings for 12 weeks with a cohort of LGBTQ peers	LGBTQ Teens develop capacities in leadership and teamwork	
	LGBTQ Teens are interested in the arts, but lack exposure to community arts resources	Structured team-building activities to establish shared values, identify the strengths different members bring to the group and work towards a common goal Orient teens in how to navigate a museum, learn about artists and critically discuss art they have seen	LGBTQ Teens feel comfortable in a museum and gain exposure and critical analysis skills	LGBTQ Teens contribute productively to the LGBTQ and arts communities
	LGBTQ Teens have the potential to make meaningful contributions to community development through event planning and organization	Support LGBTQ TNPC alumnae to play a leadership role for the new cohort of LGBTQ teens	LGBTQ Teens are confident in their self-identification and have greater ability to speak openly about LGBTQ issues	
	LGBTQ Teens are underrepresented in community decision-making processes	Build teen's capacity to plan and execute an LGBTQ-themed community event, both in terms of content development and logistics	LGBTQ Teens gain new skills in event planning and community organizing	LGBTQ Teens develop capacities in marketable life skills
Community	Brooklyn Museum engages in ongoing efforts to raise funds for teen programs and to serve the community	Recruit LGBTQ teens to participate in the TNPC Program, particularly marginalized and underrepresented youth and youth of color	Brooklyn Museum recruits LGBTQ-people, particularly those from marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds, in their teen programs	LGBTQ Teens shape youth programs and create dialogue on LGBTQ topics and perspectives at the Brooklyn Museum
	Teens in Brooklyn Museum's teen programs are interested in participating in an LGBTQ-themed teen program	Develop a curriculum to orient teens to the Brooklyn Museum, with particular attention to LGBTQ-identified artists and LGBTQ-themed art work and looking at other art works through a queer lens	Teen night attendees (both LGBTQ teens and allies) have greater exposure to Brooklyn Museum LGBTQ-themed programs and collections	
	New York City has many LGBTQ artists and artwork that speaks to the LGBTQ experience that would be relevant and engaging for teens	Connect teens with LGBTQ professionals in the arts and event planning fields		
		Identify and promote other LGBTQ-themed opportunities and those targeting teens in New York City, including those at the Brooklyn Museum		
				Updated: April 2016

is mostly limited to those who are twenty-one and older.”<sup>20</sup> The three-year grant was awarded to the Brooklyn Museum in 2014, and I was hired soon after as a second teen programs coordinator to craft and pilot Alemán’s vision for this new and necessary endeavor.

The LGBTQ TNPC began as a ten-week paid internship opportunity for eight LGBTQ youth ages fourteen to nineteen who worked collaboratively to envision, plan, and execute an LGBTQ Teen Night at the museum each June. Like all teen programs at Brooklyn Museum, this program is grounded in professional development, access to multiple experiences in the arts, meaningful work and youth leadership, youth-driven critical

and conscious programming, and social justice practice. All of the museum’s paid teen internships are geared toward those with marginalized experiences who have historically been excluded from access to paid opportunities for skills development, namely low income and working-class youth, and youth of color. Additionally, the unique aspect of this program seeks to address some of the needs and desires of LGBTQ youth to build community, see themselves and their futures as LGBTQ educators, artists, and organizers, and feel connected to other LGBTQ teens and a larger LGBTQ community (fig. 3).

The program has evolved and grown over four years as a direct result of the teens’ needs and feedback, including the following:

- [My goal for joining the program was] to become more involved in things that had to do with the LGBTQ community. I was able to meet a group of people that are actively involved in the LGBTQ community and this could help me become more involved.
- My school doesn't even have a GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance] and I've never really been involved in [an] LGBT space, especially because it's not permitted in my school, so I thought it would be refreshing and important and empowering.
- It's so hard to reach out and get in touch with other queer kids that are different from you, even within the same city.
- I just want my voice out there, making a change and doing something.
- Some of the [LGBTQ young people] are scared to come out, and I want to help them be in safe spaces.<sup>21</sup>

I have been fortunate to not only implement a program I wish I could have had access to when I was a young person but also to learn and grow in my own identity in the process. While I speak about the meaningful work this program has created for the young people I work with, I do so as an LGBTQ museum educator and museum visitor with experiences and needs that overlap with those of the teens with whom I work. I love teens. I wholeheartedly believe in their ability to see themselves and their surroundings with such immediacy that, as I have gotten older, I now understand can get clouded by past experiences and speculation. I believe teenagers are at a very difficult point in their lives, on the verge of shaping the world through continued education, careers, or relationships—all of which can go in several directions at once. Many teenagers experience bullying, mental health issues, abuse, pregnancy, assault, insecurity, early family obligations, and homelessness, and yet they do not have the legal or social freedom granted by the state or society required for them to take control of

## Through collections ranging from ancient Egyptian art to contemporary American photography, we can continually re-curate, re-program, re-hang, re-claim, and re-write, in step with queering the museum.

their own lives. Young people push the world forward and can clearly identify past mistakes and build the future they want to live in. I believe teens should be listened to and learned from. As someone who battled mental health issues, emotional abuse, and the trauma of changing family dynamics as a young person, I have struggled with understanding my own racial and sexual identity. As a light-skinned biracial child of a black African American father and a white Norwegian, English, and German American mother, I moved to different homes in new cities with varying levels of experience and support with which to understand my blackness. My understanding of my gender and sexual identity—as a queer, androgynous-identifying woman—is still in flux, and I too wish to see myself and my communities represented in museums and other cultural institutions through exhibitions, programs, and staff. It is only through that visibility and community-building that I have come to understand that identity for myself.

There are a handful of other art museums engaged in or beginning to engage in serving the needs of LGBTQ youth through the development of explicit programming, such as the Andy Warhol Museum's LGBTQ+ Youth Prom or the Museum of Modern Art's Open Art Space, not without their own histories of

resistance and triumph. But what does it mean for an encyclopedic museum like the Brooklyn Museum to host dedicated programming specifically for LGBTQ youth? I believe it speaks volumes not only to the power of an institution to begin to (re)write history but also to understand its colonialist legacy and make courageous efforts to address it.

Through collections ranging from ancient Egyptian art to contemporary American photography, we can continually re-curate, re-program, re-hang, re-claim, and re-write, in step with queering the museum. In the first year of the LGBTQ TNPC, the Brooklyn Museum organized *Zanele Muholi: Isibonelo Evidence* (2015), a solo exhibition by the black lesbian South African visual activist. During this year, I geared the LGBTQ TNPC curriculum to be focused on this exhibition, with it acting as the catalyst for the eight members of the LGBTQ TNPC to plan LGBTQ Teen Night: Our Normative. With Muholi in town for the opening and related programs, there was also a chance for a conversation and exchange between the artist and the teens leading up to their event. This moment helped to engage the teens and their work in a global context—for example, South Africa was the first country in the world to safeguard sexual orientation as a human right in its Constitution in 1994 and was the fifth country in the world to legalize gay marriage in 2006. However, largely due to its legacy of apartheid, it is still very much dealing with social segregation, in addition to anti-black and anti-LGBTQ discrimination and violence.

This exhibition, organized by senior curators Catherine J. Morris and Eugenie Tsai, also provided significant opportunities to use the art on display to create LGBTQ-specific programming. Adjoa Jones de Almeida (then school partnership coordinator, now director of education) developed a suite of programs for visitors of all ages that challenged binary concepts of gender. One day focused on exploring gender construction

and gender identity for families with children ages five and under, such as story time and pretend-play approaching gallery spaces in the museum's historic Dutch houses, and activities for children ages six through twelve investigating gender and the language of identity in partnership with the Ackerman Institute Gender & Family project. The second day of programming included a panel discussion for adults featuring Muholi and trans and gender-nonconforming activists Tourmaline, Kelle Coleman, and Mateo Tabares, which was moderated by Alemán.

In 2017 the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art celebrated its tenth anniversary, sparking *A Year of Yes: Reimagining Feminism* at the Brooklyn Museum, a yearlong focus on exhibitions and programming that highlight feminism. One such exhibition was *A Woman's Afterlife: Gender Transformation in Ancient Egypt*, curated by Edward Bleiberg. This intimate exhibition, presented adjacent to the museum's extensive ancient Egyptian art galleries, encompassed a relooking and retelling of gender and how it could have been understood by Egyptians thousands of years ago, largely based on recent contributions of feminist scholarship in Egyptology. While the exhibition itself at times still reinforced a binary gender construct, it was extraordinary in the way it called into question and rewrote understandings of history. This exhibition served as inspiration for our LGBTQ Teen Night: A Night Among the Gods in June 2017.

In 2017 the Brooke Astor Fund's grant funding ended for LGBTQ TNPC and Digital Artizens. With this end in earmarked financing came an opportunity for growth and a test of the museum's commitment to continuing dedicated LGBTQ-specific programming. In September 2017 I was promoted to a new position, teen programs manager, spearheading a current and projected expansion of teen programs overall. For the 2017–18 school year, teen programs coordinator Ximena Izquierdo Ugaz and I proposed new programs, including

InterseXtions: Gender & Sexuality, a two-part, nine-month LGBTQ teen internship combining much of the success of the two grant-funded teen programs, and incorporating feedback from participants and partners over the past three years. The desire for more LGBTQ creative spaces, for exploring identity and history through art, and for youth leadership and activism is still a driving agent in our planning for teen programs in the future.

InterseXtions: Gender & Sexuality is now the museum's largest teen program, with sixteen young people participating in part one. I am still learning and growing, adjusting the program through my mistakes and missed opportunities, and shifting my perspective alongside these amazing teen activists, artists, organizers, programmers, writers, and curious learners. Nearly all of them are people of color who come from a range of experiences across trans, queer, and nonbinary identities. At the time of this publication, we will be in the second year of this new expansion—the fifth year of the program and sixth annual LGBTQ Teen Night—and I am excited to see how we can continue to build on the legacy of these incredible educators, artists, and teens to be responsive to and talk about sex, sexuality, gender, representation, race, class, religion, language, and nationality. We are supported by a growing understanding of inclusion and of LGBTQ issues in the media and in arts and culture, and I hope that continues to unfold in its many layers and complexities.

A growing number of museums, galleries, and heritage organizations have become more confident in articulating their purpose and value in social terms and claiming a role as agents of progressive social change.<sup>22</sup> Under the directorship of Anne Pasternak (appointed in fall 2015), the Brooklyn Museum revised its mission statement to include a section on values, which states: “We work to be conscious of the narratives that shape our visitors’ views of history and their place in the world as well as our own, and we seek

out and promote perspectives that expand the stories we tell. We believe the Museum is a place where people can see themselves with dignity and each other with empathy, care, and respect. As a public, civic institution we believe it is our mandate to contribute to the advancement of society with a commitment to true connectedness and diversity.”

The goals of this mission statement are the responsibility of not only educators and public programmers to achieve, but also of executive staff, curators, visitor services staff, and members of the museum board, in a shared effort to create targeted programming, exhibitions, and opportunities that center on marginalized stories, identities, and histories and challenge discriminatory understandings of the world. Museums’ teen programs are often built on the understanding that museums play a vital role in youth development, professional development, community building, and leadership. Many teen programs are designed with the understanding that teens are marginalized in decision-making processes and civic engagement, and use their resources and platform to build meaningful opportunities for leadership and growth for young people. While we may recognize, through age-based programming, physical and emotional development as sites for marginalization, institutions are often hesitant to recognize other marginalized identities, such as race, class, sexual identity, and gender identity. I believe “courageous conversations” about these subjects have to start with institutions understanding their resources and how to use them in a just and equitable way, which often means creating dedicated programming—both as a way to support the needs of those communities most marginalized and a way for institutions to make a public commitment to seeking to understand, serve, and amplify these communities.

The Brooklyn Museum’s success has been made possible through the love and labor of the teen programs staff (many of whom are LGBTQ) as well as the support of other people and departments working to expand

the stories being told, from the curators of *Hide/Seek* to the director's suggestion for an LGBTQ Teen Night, to public programs. It takes so many people to make it work, and it unfortunately has often fallen on the backs of LGBTQ educators of color to do the heavy lifting. Brooklyn Museum, as with many institutions, is still learning, growing, and experimenting; the museum is definitely not without its faults, and we, too, have encountered considerable resistance and hurdles internally and externally in this process. But like many other art museums shifting their exhibitions and programs to be reflective of their communities, the Brooklyn Museum has become a space where, especially for those of us in teen programs, we can constantly challenge our understandings of what it truly means to champion marginalized voices within a colonialist institution and inscribe historically and socially the shared future that we hope to create.

We all have our part to play in the revolution. Being explicit, bold, and brave through centering—by way of staff, programs, and exhibitions—the experiences of the most marginalized groups—across all identities—is crucial if museums aim to reflect the shared culture—past and present—of all people. ■

1 The shooting at Pulse nightclub on July 12, 2016, was the deadliest act of violence against LGBTQ people and the deadliest single-gunman mass shooting in the United States at the time. Forty-nine people were killed and fifty-eight were injured by gunman Omar Mateen, who was reported to have frequently made homophobic, racist, and sexist comments in the past. The night of the shooting was the club's Latin night; nearly all the victims were Lantinx.

2 LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and more/other. For the purposes of this essay, I will use the acronym "LGBTQ" (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer), however terminology and corresponding acronyms are regional, cultural, and constantly shifting. This acronym is meant to include all identities that sit outside the socially accepted norm of cisgender individuals (male or female identity and sex assigned at birth) and of heterosexual orientation—including lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, intersex, two spirit, transgender, gender nonconforming, questioning, and queer. For a glossary of related terminology, see Human Rights Campaign glossary of terms, <http://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>.

3 For a full report on violence against LGBTQ communities, including a timeline of the LGBTQ rights movement and resistance work alongside anti-LGBTQ legislation, see "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Hate Violence in 2016," National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, [http://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NCAVP\\_2016HateViolence\\_REPORT.pdf](http://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NCAVP_2016HateViolence_REPORT.pdf).

4 "LGBTQ Census Advocacy, 1990–2017," National LGBTQ Task Force, <http://www.thetaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/LGBTQ-Census-Advocacy.pdf>.

5 "The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey," National Center for Transgender Equality, <http://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS%20Full%20Report%20-%20FINAL%201.6.17.pdf>.

6 See LGBTstats, Williams Institute Data Blog, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/lgbtstats/>.

7 Colleen O'Connor, "Pediatricians See Growing Number of Cross-Gender Kids like Coy Mathis," *Denver Post*, March 2, 2013, <http://www.denverpost.com/2013/03/02/pediatricians-see-growing-number-of-cross-gender-kids-like-coy-mathis/>.

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13 O'Connor, "Pediatricians See Growing Number of Cross-Gender Kids like Coy Mathis."

14 "Statistics You Should Know about Gay & Transgender Students," PFLAG NYC, <http://www.pflagnyc.org/safeschools/statistics>.

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**ART, EXPERIENCE,  
COMMUNITY**

**LEARNING AND  
ENGAGEMENT AT  
THE SAINT LOUIS  
ART MUSEUM  
BEFORE AND  
AFTER FERGUSON**

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## AMANDA THOMPSON RUNDAHL

Director of Learning and Engagement, Saint Louis Art Museum

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On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown Jr.'s life was cut tragically short when he was shot and killed by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, a St. Louis County suburb roughly ten miles from the Saint Louis Art Museum. Having recently moved to St. Louis, in June 2014, I had only briefly passed through Ferguson on my way to the neighboring community of Florissant to attend the Fiesta in Florissant festival held each year. Nothing in particular stood out to me on that brief visit. It appeared to be a well-kept working-class community. I remember making a mental note that the main business corridor looked like it had some interesting locally owned shops and restaurants that I might like to return to at some point. That unremarkable suburban business corridor of Ferguson soon would become the epicenter of protests, clashes between police and residents, and 24-7 media coverage.

As the news of Michael Brown's death broke and the vigils, memorials, and protests began, my thoughts quickly turned to the museum's role and my new role as the leader of the team focused on education and community engagement. Despite my fifteen years of experience in museum education—much of it focusing on diversity and inclusion in volunteer recruitment and community-based partnerships—I questioned whether I was equipped to know what to do. I was a recent transplant from relatively homogenous Minnesota and grew up in an almost entirely white community in rural Wisconsin. I knew that close to half of the residents of the City of St. Louis are African American. I later would learn that Ferguson's African American population is even larger, at 67 percent of the population. But I had not yet begun to scratch the surface of understanding the long and complex history of race relations in the city.

St. Louis remains largely segregated—the division between predominantly white and black populated areas is striking (fig. 1).

It is very easy to live in an affluent area of the region and be unaware of the daily stresses of poverty, violence, and lack of access to quality services, such as healthcare and education, that some residents in other areas face. I quickly learned that many of my white and African American colleagues at the museum were feeling as anxious and uncertain as I was. This was the case even among colleagues native to the area and those who had lived and worked in St. Louis for years. As compassionate human beings and educators committed to the community in which we live and work, we found ourselves exploring what we should and could do to foster productive dialogue around the difficult and emotionally charged situation and its underlying context and root causes. As I wrestled with these issues, I found it challenging at times to distinguish between my personal convictions and my desire to interact politically and socially with these and other issues from my professional practice, which engages with political and social issues through the lens of the collections and exhibitions of the museum.

Just days after Michael Brown's death, the Saint Louis Art Museum's board of commissioners adopted its new strategic plan, Art, Experience, Community. The plan had been in development during the months prior, but its focus was suddenly even more urgent and relevant than before: "We will engage, in a deliberate and sustained way, with the local and regional community to forge connections with art, with the Museum, and with each other. Growth in our audience will be a catalyst for richer engagement, more frequent visitation, and a museum loved—and used—by the entire community."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the new strategic plan articulating a reaffirmed commitment to community engagement fresh in my mind, I was still relatively new to my role. I had not yet had

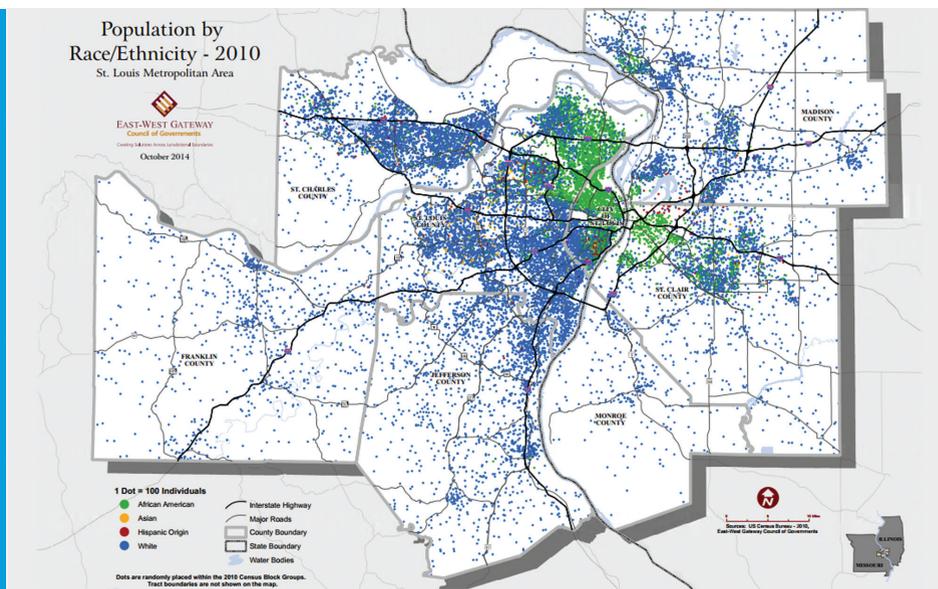
the opportunity to work with colleagues and community partners to develop specific new initiatives to act on this commitment. Our early conversations about what the museum's response should be to the unfolding events in Ferguson were reserved, polite, and superficial. They provided the opportunity for me to learn more from colleagues about the museum's well-established relationships with Ferguson's community leaders and organizations, as well as the Ferguson-Florissant School District.

What got us talking—*really* talking—about the museum's response was an inquiry from a community member interested in partnering with the museum on a program involving students from Ferguson and students from a largely white, affluent school district nearby. After a great deal of thought and discussion, we respectfully declined this partnership, primarily because the proposal came from someone who was not a resident or otherwise affiliated with an organization in Ferguson. Like so many of us, the community member genuinely wanted to contribute to improving the situation in some way. There would be other requests for the museum to lend its name and resources to projects proposed by people from outside Ferguson. We sincerely considered each project, but in each instance we declined, deciding instead to focus on being responsive to interests and needs that came from individuals and organizations with closer ties to Ferguson. This decision was not arrived at lightly or easily. However, we felt the most genuine response would be one cocreated with people who live and work in Ferguson. We believed projects initiated without their consent and input were potentially misguided and could appear more self-serving than community-focused.

Thus, we agreed that our existing model for cocreated programs was the one we would follow. This model is not uniquely ours. However, it is well suited to the museum's broader institutional approach, which is measured and thoughtful. Relationships with community organizations are often

FIG. 1

St. Louis metropolitan area population by race and ethnicity based on the 2010 Census



forged over several years. During this time, the museum and its partner organization become acquainted through relatively low-risk, minimal-resource activities, such as customized museum tours, transportation support, or a welcome table highlighting the collaboration during the museum's popular weekly program Family Sunday. As the partnership develops, an entirely new cocreated program might emerge. Often, this consists of a multisession programmatic residency with a teaching artist whose work addresses issues relevant to both organizations and the audience for the partnership program. On occasion, partner relationships result in the development of an entirely new program, as was the case with A World of Difference—a long-standing partnership with the local chapter of the Anti-Defamation League—or the museum's annual Kwanzaa celebration, which is copresented with the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

We also affirmed our commitment to the belief that art offers opportunities for protest and self-expression, and that it can serve as a catalyst for dialogue about current events. In fact, the day after Michael Brown's death marked the close of the exhibition *Anything but Civil: Kara Walker's Vision of the Old*

*South*, which featured Walker's 2005 print portfolio *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*. Showing this group of fifteen large-scale prints—a promised gift to the museum—offered opportunities to develop interpretive materials and programs that invite dialogue among scholars, artists, and the general public around broader issues of slavery, the Civil War, and the complex and painful legacy of that period in our history.

We also discussed whether we should deviate from our existing practice of consciously working to equitably distribute museum programs and resources throughout the region and temporarily direct additional resources toward Ferguson. However, we were concerned doing so would then take high-quality arts education resources away from other parts of our community where the racial tensions, education, and well-being disparities were just as great. The effects of inequities throughout the region in access to healthcare, housing, education, and employment are sobering. Recent population statistics for the region illustrate the harsh consequences of these disparities, explaining that “at its extreme in the St. Louis region, life expectancy differs by nearly 40 years depending on zip

## **We also affirmed our commitment to the belief that art offers opportunities for protest and self-expression, and that it can serve as a catalyst for dialogue about current events.**

code. In mostly white, suburban Wildwood, Missouri, the life expectancy is 91.4 years. In the mostly black, inner-ring suburb of Kinloch, Missouri, life expectancy is just 55.9 years.”<sup>22</sup>

The museum is a subdistrict of the St. Louis Zoological Museum District (ZMD) and receives property tax support from residents of the City of St. Louis and suburban St. Louis County. This tax revenue constitutes approximately two thirds of the museum’s annual operating budget. Therefore, we have a direct obligation and responsibility to city and county taxpayers. A large majority of our school and community programs are directed at the taxing district’s twenty-four school districts and eighty-eight incorporated municipalities and unincorporated areas, which we regard as our primary audiences. Ferguson is located in St. Louis County, within the taxing district.

Historically, Saint Louis Art Museum educators had made significant effort with clear intentionality to distribute resources across the taxing district. The goal was and is to invite and support broad visitation and participation from throughout the taxing district as well as to make ongoing outreach efforts directed at schools and communities where the greatest disparities are found—as indicated by measurable criteria such as Title I schools, free and reduced lunch rates, and high levels of poverty. Museum admission is free, and nearly all of the museum’s programs for schools, youth, and families are offered free of charge. However, we recognize there

are other barriers to participation. Approaches to increasing access for underrepresented audiences have included transportation support for school field trips, a summer teen employment program, and a multisession programming model that originates at a community site and includes one or more organized visits to the museum.

In the days following Michael Brown’s death, politicians, activists, artists, and media outlets from around the globe descended on Ferguson. We anticipated that once the international attention waned, this influx of people and resources would disappear. We realized that our commitment to Ferguson was a long-term one, that we would be responsive to any immediate needs expressed by the residents and organizations of Ferguson through our network of partnerships, and that we would remain committed to continuing the education and community engagement work we had been developing for more than a decade (fig. 2). We decided to maintain our focus on long-term relationships and impact rather than reacting with a quick-fix, feel-good solution.

The focus of the museum’s mission is a deeply held commitment to connecting people with original works of art: “The Saint Louis Art Museum collects, presents, interprets, and conserves works of art of the highest quality across time and cultures; educates, inspires discovery, and elevates the human spirit; and preserves a legacy of artistic achievement for the people of St. Louis and the world.”

One thing I perhaps did not fully appreciate in August 2014, but have come to better understand today, is the clarity and discipline with which the institution is committed to this core value. This commitment can be rare in the current programming landscape in which marketing, revenue, and attendance goals often overshadow the educational objectives that led me to this work. It is not that the museum is afraid to present challenging work or address controversial topics such as race and

**FIG. 2**

Seventh-grade students from Ferguson Middle School collaborating with artists Steven and William Ladd during the Ladds' Scrollathon programmatic residency at the Saint Louis Art Museum in February 2016



inequality. Quite the contrary. The museum's collections and exhibitions are powerful vehicles through which contemporary topics are brought to the forefront. As an especially relevant example, in 2016 the museum acquired a series of seven lithographs titled *All Hands on Deck* (2015) by St. Louis-based artist Damon Davis in response to the events in Ferguson in the wake of Michael Brown's killing. Additionally, during her 2014–15 Henry L. and Natalie E. Freund Fellowship with the Saint Louis Art Museum and the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts at Washington University, Mariam Ghani produced a new multimedia work, *The City & the City*, a fictional narrative that focuses on “border zones” in St. Louis that are the result of deindustrialization and population shifts. The work was shown as part of the exhibition *Currents 110: Mariam Ghani* at the museum that culminated her fellowship, and she presented her work in a public lecture and discussion.

Just as the approach we took was best suited to our organizational mission and institutional character, the responses from other St. Louis museums and cultural organizations were similarly tailored. For example, the Missouri History Museum, our peer ZMD institution situated across Forest Park, responded very differently yet with similar clarity and integrity to its mission and character. The Missouri History Museum served as a forum for town-hall meetings and other programming in the weeks and months after Michael Brown's death. This was very much in keeping with its

mission and expertise as an institution focused on connecting the history of Missouri with contemporary issues faced by Missourians.

Three years after the events in Ferguson, the museum educator colloquium *What We May Be* at the Clark Art Institute has helped me to reflect on and unpack my thoughts and actions from that chaotic and confusing period when the world's attention was focused here. I now recognize that I experienced a healthy degree of uncertainty about whether or not we were taking the right approach. It was healthy in that I did not assume I had all the answers, prompting me to think deeply with others about how to respond in a sincere and productive way as I acted on behalf of the educational mission of my institution. I found that as I leaned into my training and experience as a museum educator, I found confidence in the vulnerability and productivity developed through work with colleagues and collaborators from across the museum and the community. My approach was also context specific, grounded in the mission, vision, and values of the museum and the region's history and present moment. This work is not quick, neat, or easy, but it is more critical and essential now than ever before. ■

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**WHAT  
MUSEUMS  
MAY BE**

**CRUCIBLES FOR  
REFLECTION,  
EMPATHY, AND  
OPTIMISM**

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## TWYLA KITTS

Teacher Programs Educator, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

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Social justice can be defined as justice that relates to the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. Art offers rich opportunities for considering this theme because it provides visual evidence about the beliefs and values of diverse human communities over thousands of years and from around the planet. Since collectors began grouping interesting objects and artifacts in cabinets of curiosity during the Renaissance, galleries and museums have acquired, presented, and interpreted their collections through numerous lenses. Today, art museums are moving away from traditional interpretations of works and toward more open-ended ideas of meaning intended to appeal to increasingly broader audiences. Museum educators, in particular, often lead efforts to facilitate inclusive conversations instead of delivering lectures. The resulting dialogues offer new insights into who we have been, who we are now, and who we may become in an uncertain future.

As the teacher programs educator at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) in

Richmond, I develop and deliver programs designed to encourage teachers and students to make connections between art and Virginia's Standards of Learning in all K–12 disciplines. My intention in this essay is to describe how my interest in a single painting gradually led to the development of a rich reservoir of resources for exploring the intersection of art, social justice, and individual responsibility in engaging and innovative ways. Throughout my career, I have often touched on themes of social justice, but the intentional development of resources targeted specifically at these themes began in 2012 when VMFA acquired the 1965 portrait of the renowned singer Marian Anderson by American artist Beauford Delaney (fig. 1). The workshops, gallery experiences, and projects discussed below evolved organically as a result of my own interest and in light of interactions with individual teachers, groups of educators, and museum colleagues.

When I first viewed Delaney's painting, I knew he was a leading twentieth-century African American painter and that Anderson's 1939



Bengt Holmberg, 1965

**FIG. 1**

In this “memory” portrait—painted in Paris but with an awareness of the civil rights struggles underway in America—Delaney expressed his ongoing admiration for Anderson’s sensitive brilliance as a performer and person. Beauford Delaney (*American, 1901–79*), *Marian Anderson, 1965*. Oil on canvas, 63 × 51 1/2 in. (160.02 × 130.81 cm). Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. J. Harwood and Louise B. Cochrane Fund for American Art, 2012.277. Photo: Travis Fullerton © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial was an important precursor to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s. The portrait also brought back childhood memories of thick black records (78s with grooves on only one side) of Anderson’s performances playing on my family’s (now antique) record player, and her smoky, resonant voice perfectly matching the poetry in the spirituals, ballads, and arias. From the beginning of my exploration, this memory spurred me to experiment with methodologies that would allow others to make their own personal and emotional connections with the painting. It was

the visual impact of the portrait, however, that made me eager to learn more about both the painter and the subject.

Delving more deeply into Anderson’s story, I learned that in 1935 she returned to the United States after a smashingly successful world tour. She was hailed as one of the greatest singers of the era—praised by the esteemed Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, decorated by the king of Sweden, and awarded the Prix de Chant in Paris. After hearing her sing at the prestigious Salzburg Festival in 1935, the influential Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini exclaimed, “Yours is a voice such as one hears once in a hundred years.”<sup>1</sup>

Back in the United States between fall 1935 and 1939, she performed to great acclaim at Carnegie Hall in New York and at a host of other notable venues across the nation, including the White House.<sup>2</sup> In spring 1939 she was scheduled to give a performance sponsored by Howard University, a leading

historically black educational institution in Washington, DC. At the time, it was standard practice for performers with international reputations such as Anderson’s to perform in Constitution Hall, which was owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Capable of accommodating an audience of about four thousand, this venue was the only auditorium in the area large enough for the crowds that Anderson’s performances routinely commanded, but the DAR refused to allow her to sing there because of her race.

## **Art offers rich opportunities for considering this theme because it provides visual evidence about the beliefs and values of diverse human communities over thousands of years and from around the planet.**

The DAR’s position was a call to action to many people, including First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who brought national attention to the situation by resigning her membership to the DAR in protest. After numerous attempts to secure alternate locations, arrangements were ultimately made for the concert to take place in the open air in front of the Lincoln Memorial. The event established Anderson as an iconic figure in the fight for social justice and the Lincoln Memorial as a national stage for the civil rights movement.

Anderson never set out to become an icon for a movement, but when asked to sing in the midst of this controversy over racial segregation, she rose to the occasion. She explained, “I could not run away from the situation. I had become, whether I liked it or not, a symbol, representing my people. I had to appear.”<sup>3</sup>

On April 9, 1939, an overcast Easter Sunday, seventy-five thousand people gathered to hear Anderson's performance—and hundreds of thousands more heard her over the radio. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes introduced her with the words, "Genius draws no color line." She began the performance with "My Country, 'Tis of Thee (America)," followed it with arias and spirituals, and ended the concert with an unplanned, but appropriate, encore—"Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen."<sup>4</sup> Anderson's reaction to the thunderous applause of the crowd underscores her generous spirit. She told them, "I am overwhelmed. I can't tell you what you have done for me today. I thank you from the bottom of my heart again and again."<sup>5</sup>

In her 1984 autobiography, *My Lord, What a Morning*, Anderson shared her thoughts about personal responsibility: "There are many persons ready to do what is right because in their hearts they know it is right. But they hesitate, waiting for the other fellow to make the first move—and he, in turn, waits for you. The minute a person whose word means a great deal dares to take the open-hearted and courageous way, many others follow. Not everyone can be turned away from meanness and hatred, but the great majority of Americans is headed that way. I have a great belief in the future of my people and my country."<sup>6</sup>

As I began to offer gallery tours that included Delaney's painting, I found that the example provided by Anderson's grace and strength in the face of discriminatory policies often served as a catalyst for gallery conversations about contemporary issues. Many younger visitors had no idea who Anderson was, so introducing her story and playing the concert video in front of her image was often a revelation for them, which on occasion led to meaningful outcomes. For example, a group of pre-service teachers from Virginia Commonwealth University were so affected by the portrait and Anderson's story that they chose it as the focus for a semester-long project, which

coupled present-day social problems with personal sources of inspiration.<sup>7</sup> Their thought-provoking lesson plans strengthened my resolve to find additional strategies for sharing stories linked to Anderson's portrait.

I found that close-observation activities successfully engage visitors with the painting. In one standard gallery experience, for example, tour participants are asked to mentally divide the painting into quarters and sketch what they see in each section. As they carefully examine the work, they often notice the intense colors and swirling textures surrounding the figure. Anderson gazes out from the canvas, her dark eyes and hair accentuated by their contrast with a background thickly painted in hues of yellow-gold. The observations that are made while sketching also typically prompt participants to ask questions related to the work.

Many of their questions are about Beauford Delaney. Born and raised in Knoxville, Tennessee, he spent five years in Boston before moving to New York City in 1929, just a few days after the stock market crashed. His friends and acquaintances included leaders of the NAACP and numerous distinguished artists, writers, and musicians—music in particular was one of his greatest sources of comfort and inspiration. The portraits that helped to establish his early reputation as an artist included drawings and paintings of jazz musicians, such as Louis Armstrong, Ethel Waters, and Duke Ellington.

In the early 1930s Delaney made his first sketches of Anderson, and his admiration for her continued throughout his life.<sup>8</sup> In addition to appreciating her exquisite voice, he likely felt a certain kinship with her. They shared similar backgrounds, coming from relatively poor but close-knit and supportive families. They both struggled to overcome the barriers that blocked their artistic ambitions in the racially segregated United States of the early twentieth century. In an era when black performers and artists

were often relegated to marginal subcategories, they each expressed the desire to take their rightful places among the great artists of the day—whether black or white. Anderson’s career eventually proved that a person of color, through innate talent, perseverance, and diligent effort, could achieve the artistic triumphs, financial success, and prestige that an artist of her prominence deserved.<sup>9</sup>

Delaney’s first oil painting to feature Anderson was completed in 1951, after he had taken James Baldwin, his young protégé, to hear her perform. Baldwin described the experience of hearing Anderson sing in his essay “The Price of the Ticket,” recalling, “I still remember Miss Anderson, at the end of that concert, in a kind of smoky yellow gown, her skin copper and tan, roses in the air about her, roses at her feet.”<sup>10</sup> The 1951 painting features the celebrated singer in an abstracted Greenwich Village setting. The 1965 portrait is quite different, and Delaney’s aesthetic choices for it provide clues to the emotional context in which it was created. As he painted, Delaney channeled his visual and emotional memories in an attempt “to merge color and form into the essence of things felt and remembered.”<sup>11</sup> He placed Anderson in the position that a saint or a Madonna might occupy in an icon or an altarpiece and surrounded the singer with a vibrant yellow-gold backdrop.<sup>12</sup> By the 1960s Delaney’s health had deteriorated, and he was suffering from intermittent bouts of mental illness during which he experienced vivid hallucinations. The color yellow, for him, held the promise of light, healing, and redemption.<sup>13</sup> Anderson’s image, which he kept in his Paris studio apartment, must have offered solace and comfort akin to that provided by a venerated icon, to which the painting is often compared. Baldwin, who viewed Delaney as his “spiritual father,” understood this aspect of his portraits. He wrote in his 1965 essay “On the Painter Beauford Delaney” that Delaney’s late works “held the power to illuminate, even to redeem and reconcile and heal.”<sup>14</sup>

An opportunity to create more permanent and versatile resources related to Delaney’s painting arose when I was invited to participate in the Library of Virginia’s 2013 summer institute for history teachers, which was focused on primary sources. As I developed the institute session, a Google search led me to “The Negro and the Constitution,” a speech delivered in 1944 by a high school junior during an oratory contest sponsored by the black Elks. The contest winner was Martin Luther King Jr., and his speech included this stirring passage:

Marian Anderson was barred from singing in the Constitution Hall, ironically enough, by the professional daughters of the very men who founded this nation for liberty and equality. But this tale had a different ending. The nation rose in protest, and gave a stunning rebuke to the Daughters of the American Revolution and a tremendous ovation to the artist, Marian Anderson. . . . When the words of “America” and “Nobody Knows the Trouble I Seen” rang out over that great gathering, there was a hush on the sea of uplifted faces, black and white, and a new baptism of liberty, equality and fraternity.<sup>15</sup>

The history teachers enthusiastically participated in the interactive session Image, Knowledge, and Memory: 1939, A VMFA Blast to the Past, and they were particularly struck by the connection with King. Not a single teacher in the group had been aware of this early speech, which so powerfully demonstrated that the sharing of important stories from earlier eras can guide the footsteps of those who follow.

The following August I was invited to present a workshop for English teachers at a local high school. The Anderson portrait served as the grand finale of the session, which also included creative writing and literary connections. Our exploration began with a sensory inventory, one of VMFA’s most effective activities for engaging audiences. Teachers reacted to Delaney’s painting by completing the sentences below:



FIG. 2

Johnson inscribed the back of the painting with these words “A veritable incident/ in the Civil War seen by / myself at Centerville / on this morning of / McClellan’s advance towards Manassas / March 2, 1862 / Eastman Johnson.” Eastman Johnson (American, 1824–1906), *A Ride for Liberty—the Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862*, 1862. Oil on board, 21 1/2 × 26 in. (54.5 × 66 cm). Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. Paul Mellon Collection, 85.644. Photo: Katherine Wetzel © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

I can almost. . .  
taste the \_\_\_\_\_ and  
feel the \_\_\_\_\_; it’s as if I  
hear the sound of \_\_\_\_\_, and I am  
reminded of the smell of \_\_\_\_\_.  
Strangely enough, I think of \_\_\_\_\_  
when I see \_\_\_\_\_.

This exercise linked the painting to sense memories and paired the work with various readings, including a selection from King’s 1944 speech, evoking emotional connections. Through no planning on my part, the workshop took place on the fiftieth anniversary of King’s 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial. As a teacher read King’s words, there was not a dry eye in the room.

In 2013 Delaney’s painting also became part of a linguistic project between students in Bordeaux, France, and Richmond. Knowing that VMFA was a member of the French Regional American Museum Exchange (FRAME),<sup>16</sup> Monica Johnston, a Richmond-

based middle school French teacher, asked if member museums might facilitate dialogues about art between her students at Collegiate School and a French school near a FRAME museum. Over the summer, Johnston visited Isabelle Beccia, an educator at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux, who suggested an exchange with Brigitte Bayle’s students at the Collège Cassagnol in Bordeaux. The theme chosen by Johnston and Bayle for 2014–15 was modernity. The partner museums suggested artworks that might serve as catalysts for student interactions. In addition to selecting Delaney’s *Marian Anderson*, Johnston chose several twentieth- and twenty-first-century pieces related to the American Civil War, rural-urban migration, and the Harlem Renaissance. She explained her reasons for using art to spark conversation: “Art evokes emotion, requires reflection, and is personal—this makes material meaningful and enhances retention.” She also asked, “How might I expose my students to a variety of perspectives?” and “If each student were to share his/her unique lens, would my students respect their peers’ opinions and maybe even become more empathetic?”<sup>17</sup>

Johnston's rationale and observations, in turn, inspired me to produce additional resources with the potential to build empathy through explorations of art. In February 2015 a VMFA colleague and I organized the teacher workshop African American Dreams, which matched artworks related to the African American quest for freedom with primary-source readings from around the same time. The workshop participants included Johnston, who wrote in her evaluation, "I am returning to campus with lesson plans and ideas that I can readily integrate into my curriculum."

Monica then incorporated aspects of African American Dreams into the 2016–17 linguistic exchange program with Collège Cassagnol. She suggested the theme of *frontières* (borders), partly inspired by Eastman Johnson's *Ride for Liberty—the Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862* (1862, fig. 2), a painting featured during the workshop. The painting depicts four African Americans (two adults, a child, and an infant) on a galloping horse headed away from Confederate lines and toward the area held by the Union Army during an early campaign of the Civil War. Johnson's depiction of this desperate bid for freedom stimulated conversations among the students about contemporary issues—including immigration, the plight of refugees in Europe, and civil rights—that they were encountering through social media and international news.<sup>18</sup>

As this linguistic exchange project was developing, two independent requests from other groups made it clear that interest in social-justice themes was becoming a trend. The first occurred in September 2015, when a professor from the College of William and Mary requested a workshop that would model ways to combine art with explorations of economic class and social justice for her pre-service elementary history teachers. VMFA's extensive collection of British sporting art delineates class structure, providing a logical entry point into the topic. After examining two large-scale paintings of hunting scenes, the

group spoke about how wealth and privilege limited opportunities for some in the 1800s and reflected on similar issues that we face today.

The pre-service teachers then compared and contrasted three women depicted in nineteenth-century European paintings (figs. 3–5). A gallery activity sheet posed various questions, including "Can you assign these three ladies to a particular class?" and "When did women earn the right to vote?" These questions not only prompted the group to discuss how economic differences might have affected these women's lives but also to consult a time line of women's rights. They decided that the activity could easily be adapted in their future classrooms to introduce contemporary gender issues.

The second request came in February 2016, when a group of pre-service teachers from the organization Socially Responsible Teachers requested a workshop on art, citizenship, social status, and human rights. The group leader, their faculty advisor, and I worked together to produce gallery activities designed to explore the meaning of citizenship from ancient times to the present. The following questions were considered in relation to art from various ancient cultures: What does it mean to be a good citizen? Is being a good citizen of your country the same thing as being a good citizen of the planet? When and how have artists related their work to social status?

This workshop ended in the gallery of twenty-first century art with investigations of contemporary works. Our observations led to closing conversations about how the emergence of socially conscious artists relates to the current distribution of wealth and availability of opportunities.

As the demand for museum programs related to social-justice themes grew, I decided that the time had come to share many of these newly developed resources at educational conferences. Information about the linguistic exchange projects was provided in sessions at



**FIG. 3**

Although this portrait of Baroness Staël-Holstein depicts a woman of minor noble pedigree, the artist has devoted considerable attention to the details of her costume, jewelry, and hairstyle. Franz Xaver Winterhalter (German, 1805–73), *Portrait of Lydia Schabelsky, Baroness Staël-Holstein*, c. 1857–58. Oil on canvas, 56 3/8 x 43 in. (143.19 x 109.22 cm). 85 1/2 x 66 3/4 (217.17 x 169.55 cm), framed. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2004.69. Photo: Travis Fullerton © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



**FIG. 4**

References to “gypsies” in the gallery label associated with this painting led to an interesting discussion of using appropriate terms for various groups (e.g., Romani, rather than gypsy). Gustave Doré (French, 1832–83), *A Family of Spanish Smugglers (Les contrebandiers espagnols)*, c. 1870s. Oil on canvas, 95 x 77 1/2 in. (241.3 x 196.85 cm). Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. Various donors, by exchange, 2010.79. Photo: Travis Fullerton © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

the 2015 FRAME Conference in St. Louis and at the 2016 Foreign Language Association of Virginia (FLAVA) conference. By fall 2016, when the annual FRAME conference took place in St. Louis, the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tours and the Saint Louis Art Museum, along with local schools in France and Missouri, had begun programs inspired by the example of Collegiate School and Collège Cassagnol. This expanded group decided to call the program “Bridges across Borders: Linguistic Exchanges through Art,” indicating their aim to navigate the separations between individuals, groups, and nations. The participants hope that nurturing communication and understanding will help future generations work together to address global challenges.

The timing of these presentations was fortuitous for VMFA because they coincided with the museum’s adoption of an open-source policy for the collection and the redesign of its educational website. VMFA’s interpretation team is currently revising, augmenting, and organizing the resources described in this essay into easily

adaptable resource sets with eight to ten images of works of art, background information, and innovative ideas for engaging with them. Themes in development for the new website include such topics as global exchange; gender, race, and identity; and power, politics, and economics.

The open-ended qualities of these resources became especially significant to me because of ideas I contemplated during discussions at the Clark Art Institute colloquium. I struggled with the assumption that all museums share certain core values. I fervently hoped that this was true but found I could not precisely define these values. This inability to clearly express a definitive set of universal values led me to think about the concept of a social contract, which developed out of various ideas conceived by Enlightenment philosophers. Since then the number of individuals and groups included in and protected by this contract has increased by civil war, civil rights movements, feminism, and many other forces. The contract is still evolving, but the concept seems to me to be central to our hope of ensuring for everyone the right to life,



**FIG. 5**

In late nineteenth-century Paris, women in urban society became increasingly important as consumers. This woman's jewelry and overall carriage point to wealth and status. Alfred Stevens (Belgian, 1823–1906), *Woman in the Studio (Femme à l'atelier)*, c. 1862–65. Oil on panel, 28 3/4 x 24 1/4 in. (73.03 x 61.6 cm). Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. Gift of Joseph T. and Jane Joel Knox, 2012.59. Photo: Katherine Wetzel © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Clark discussions also led me to contemplate how my own attitudes and beliefs will be judged hundreds of years hence. Will future humans share a new and very different global social contract? How will new generations reconcile the issues that have led to the violence and public strife so prevalent today?

I cannot predict what future global social contracts will entail, but I do believe that those who develop them will need the experiences that twenty-first century museums can offer: explorations of many different visual cultures, safe environments for civil discourse about significant societal issues, critical-thinking skills, and the shared enjoyment of art. Just as the portrait of Marian Anderson served as an inspiration for a body of resources related to social justice and equality, other visual records from times past can help us find our way forward. Museums have the potential to serve as crucibles, places where positive attitudes and healing pathways can emerge from a confluence of powerful artistic, intellectual, economic, and social ideas. ■

- 1 Marian Anderson, *My Lord, What a Morning* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 158.
- 2 After attending a separate performance by Anderson, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt wrote in her *My Day* column for February 21, 1936: “[Anderson] has sung before nearly all the crowned heads and deserves her great success, for I have rarely heard a more beautiful and moving voice or a more finished artist.” Quoted in Raymond Arsenault, *The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert that Awakened America* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 94–95.
- 3 Marian Anderson, excerpt from *My Lord, What a Morning: An Autobiography, in Written by Herself, Volume 1: Autobiographies of American Women: An Anthology*, ed. Jill Ker Conway (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 89. Patricia Campbell Carson, “Birthday of Marian Anderson,” *Spirituality and Practice*, February 27, 2017, <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/naming-the-days/view/28131/birthday-of-marian-anderson>.
- 4 The sense of electricity in the air is evident in films of the performance, many of which are available on YouTube. See, for instance, “Marian Anderson Sings at Lincoln Memorial,” posted March 26, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAONYTMf2pk>.
- 5 Ben Cosgrove, “The Concert that Sparked the Civil Rights Movement,” *Time*, April 8, 2013, <http://time.com/3764037/the-concert-that-sparked-the-civil-rights-movement/>.
- 6 Anderson, *My Lord, What a Morning*, 312.
- 7 The pre-service teachers later invited me to join them at the 2014 Virginia Art Education Association’s annual conference as they gave the presentation “Culture, Memory, and Idea-based Instruction: Beauford Delaney’s Marian Anderson.”
- 8 David Leeming, *Amazing Grace: A Life of Beauford Delaney* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42–43.
- 9 Unfortunately, Delaney did not achieve great success during his lifetime. By the end of his life, Delaney was essentially relying on financial support from friends, having been largely forgotten by the art world. Mary Schmidt Campbell, foreword to *Beauford Delaney: A Retrospective* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1978).
- 10 James Baldwin, “The Price of the Ticket,” in *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 831–32.
- 11 Beauford Delaney, quoted in Lemming, *Amazing Grace*, 161.
- 12 The portrait was likely inspired by Anderson’s recital at Sainte-Chapelle chapel in Paris on September 28, 1965.
- 13 The artist’s use of the color was the focus of the exhibition *The Color Yellow: Beauford Delaney*, Anacostia Community Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 2002–03, <https://www.si.edu/exhibitions/the-color-yellow-beauford-delaney-2854>.
- 14 Baldwin, “On the Painter Beauford Delaney,” in *Collected Essays*, 721.
- 15 Martin Luther King Jr., “The Negro and the Constitution” (speech, First Baptist Church, Dublin, Georgia, 1944). A transcript is available on the website of Stanford University’s the Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, [http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc\\_440500\\_000.1.html](http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_440500_000.1.html).
- 16 The FRAME organization has since added the Petit Palais in Paris to its roster, so FRAME now stands for French American Museum Exchange.
- 17 John Forsythe, Monica Johnston, and Twyla Kitts, “The French Connection: French American Museum Exchange” (PowerPoint presentation, Foreign Language Association of Virginia Fall 2016 Conference, Williamsburg, October 7, 2016).
- 18 Other VMFA works included in the program were Sally Mann’s *Untitled #9, Antietam* (2001), Sonya Clark’s *Black Hair Flag* (2010), and Sammy Baloji’s *Untitled 21* (2006).

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Veronica Alvarez** is an educator and historian. She has worked with elementary, high school, and college students, teaching subjects such as Spanish and ancient Greek and Roman history. Her thesis explored the roles of women in Greek and Roman society. Currently she is the director of school and teacher programs at LACMA. She has worked in museum education for over eighteen years. Alvarez has served as an education consultant for the University of California, Los Angeles's Fowler Museum and Chicano Studies Research Center, Loyola Marymount University (LMU)'s Family of Schools, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the State Department of Cultural Affairs in Chiapas, Mexico. Alvarez has a BA in liberal studies and an MA in ancient Mediterranean history from California State University, Northridge. With a passion for learning and museum education for K–12 audiences, she is currently a doctoral candidate at LMU's Educational Leadership for Social Justice Program.

**Karleen Gardner**, director of learning innovation at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia), serves on the leadership team and collaborates to develop and implement institutional strategies and impactful community-focused initiatives that foster critical and creative thinking skills, empathy, and global competence. With a visitor-centered emphasis, she works with cross-functional teams to create accessible and relevant programs, in-gallery content, and engaging experiences both on-site and off-site for people of all ages and abilities. Gardner is a frequent presenter at national and international conferences and is a peer reviewer for the *Journal of Museum Education*. She received an MA in art history from the University of Mississippi and an MS in museum education leadership from Bank Street College.

**Lindsay Catherine Harris** is the current teen programs manager at the Brooklyn Museum, as well as a media artist and educator working on projects that explore identity, presence, and history. Joining the Brooklyn Museum in 2015 as the Astor Teen Programs Coordinator, she developed three new initiatives: Digital Artizens: Feminist Project, LGBTQ Teen Night Planning Committee, and the Teen Movie Night Curators, collaborating with a team of fabulous young people and colleagues to strengthen youth voice and presence within arts and cultural programming in Brooklyn. She is committed to increasing meaningful civic engagement through the arts and amplifying voices in our communities that have historically been marginalized. Originally from the Southwest, Harris has a BA in Africana studies from Vassar College and an MA in arts politics from Tisch School of the Arts at New York University.

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**Twyla Kitts**, teacher programs educator at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), Richmond, is collection educator for the Fabergé and European art galleries. She received the 2017 Virginia Council for the Social Studies Friends of Education Award and the 2014 Virginia Art Education Association Art Educator Award, and has served on Virginia Department of Education's Standards of Learning Review Committees for Visual Arts and History. She also developed the content for VMFA's 2016 mobile application *Fabergé at VMFA* and contributed an article to *Fabulous Fabergé: Jeweler to the Czars*, an exhibition catalogue published by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

**Rebecca McGinnis** is the senior managing educator for accessibility at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. She and her colleagues are internationally recognized for their pioneering programs for people with disabilities. Awards include the Lighthouse Guild's Good Neighbor Award (2016), the American Foundation for the Blind's Access Award (2014), the LEAD Award for Excellence in Accessibility Leadership (2011), and the American Council of the Blind Achievement Award in Audio Description for Museums (2011). McGinnis's publications include "Islands of Stimulation: Perspectives on the Museum Experience, Present and Future" in *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014). McGinnis coconvened with Art Beyond Sight the Multimodal Approaches to Learning conference and was a founding member and cochair of the Museum Access Consortium from 2000 to 2012. She is adjunct faculty in Johns Hopkins University's museum studies MA program. She holds MAs in art history and museum studies and is a doctoral candidate in cognitive psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University.

**Ronna Tulgan Ostheimer** has worked in the education department of the Clark for more than eighteen years, first as the coordinator of community and family programs and then, for the past nine years, as director of education. Her goal as a museum educator is to help people understand more fully that looking at and thinking about art can expand their sense of human possibility. Before coming to the Clark, Tulgan Ostheimer taught at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in the education department. She holds an EdD in psychological education from the University of Massachusetts and a BA in sociology and American studies from Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

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**Emily Wiskera** has worked in museum education since 2011, with a specialized focus on accessibility and working with diverse populations. As manager of access programs at the Dallas Museum of Art, Wiskera oversees initiatives for visitors with special needs, including programs related to dementia, vision impairment, autism, and developmental disabilities. She is passionate about making the museum an inclusive space for all visitors.

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