

WHAT WE MAY BE RADICAL PRACTICE



THE CLARK

**WHAT WE
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RADICAL
PRACTICE**

This publication was conceived by the Education Department at the Clark Art Institute. A related colloquium, titled “What We May Be: Radical Practice in an Art Museum (is there any such thing anymore? . . .) was held May 16–19, 2018, at the Clark. Visit clarkart.edu for information on programs and publications at the Clark.

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FOREWORD

Since the first *What We May Be* volume was released in spring 2019, much has changed in the world. The colloquium that served as a starting point for this volume, and the programs described within it, took place before the COVID-19 pandemic and the events of 2020 that brought renewed attention to issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility into our work and lives. The discussions in this publication about facilitating connections between people and art and engaging with our communities continue to be relevant, and directly relate to how museums may be able to respond to a collective crisis and grapple with social issues. While the recent shifts in our world and our work will continue to impact cultural institutions and museum education, the programs mentioned here offer hope and show that, at their core, museum educators are resilient, creative, and flexible—traits we know to be essential to moving the field forward in the face of unpredictable circumstances.

The word “radical” has developed certain extreme connotations, but one of its main definitions is “of, relating to, or proceeding from a root.” This is fitting for the programs described in this volume, which were designed by museum professionals who all think deeply about their philosophies and visions for museum education. Tracing their desired outcomes back to the root of what they hope to achieve as educators, facilitators, and community members, these contributors engaged in the radical practices of reflection and collaboration that generated unexpected programs for expanding audiences of museumgoers. And while some of these programs depart from conventional practices of museum education, the commitments to

working creatively, collaboratively, and with a focus on community are revealed as central to the work of museum education, regardless of the specific program.

The visitor feedback included in many of these essays speaks to a core aspect of this work as well. Understanding what visitors want from museums and what practices best support their learning and engagement with art is a challenge. But capturing responses, both positive and negative, sheds light on preconceived notions about our institutions, on which aspects of museum visits are the most meaningful and long-lasting, and on how museum educators and their colleagues and collaborators—inside and outside the museum—can create more of those moments.

Projects like *What We May Be* that elevate and reflect on a range of thoughtful, innovative, and inclusive programs are invaluable. The educators conceiving of and executing these programs demonstrate dedication to the core mission of museums as educational institutions, while also remaining committed to the idea that there is always room for experimentation, innovation, and growth.

Olivier Meslay
Hardymon Director, Clark Art Institute

**WHAT WE
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RONNA TULGAN OSTHEIMER

Director of Education, Clark Art Institute

I am delighted to share this second volume of *What We May Be*, a reflection of an art museum education colloquium series by the same name, hosted by the Clark Art Institute. Building on the focus of the first colloquium and publication, on special programs in museum education, *Radical Practice* explores innovative approaches to engaging our publics with our collections and considers the boundaries of our practice, including if there are any. If our job is to make art more relevant to more people, as Nina Simon suggests, then can “anything go” if it’s meaningful for a particular group?¹ Is there any such thing as “radical” anymore in museum education?

In May 2018, eight North American art museum educators met for three days to discuss these questions and to share specific “out-of-the-box” programs that were hosted at their own museums.² The intent of the *What We May Be* colloquia is not to serve as a forum for “show and tell,” but to be a time to reflect critically about our practice and its evolution. Each of the participants is passionately dedicated to making art meaningful in new and innovative

ways, and to expanding the different kinds of audiences we can serve. This volume presents the experiences of the colloquium participants in developing and hosting unusual museum education programs and considers what these programs may mean to our profession.

In this edition, I present the program *Curating a Culture of Respect*—designed to encourage middle school students to become more aware of their own power to shape positive futures, and to encourage teachers to utilize affective approaches—and what we have learned through our experience developing the program. In “A Radical Program: Curating A Culture of Respect,” I also suggest a new model for education in our society, in which museums partner with public schools to meet the growing needs of children in our contemporary world.

In “Learning in Silence,” Corinne Zimmermann, former director of interpretation at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, describes the Silent Tour, which uses silence to encourage focus, foster human connection, generate a sense of

FIG. 1

The Clark Center and the reflecting pool in early spring.



calm, and revitalize the art in the museum's galleries. She discusses how this tour connects to Isabella Gardner's original mission for and conception of the museum as a layered and multisensory experience and shares participant responses to the tour, such as feelings of peace and heightened connection to the group and the art objects.

Jaime Ursic, director of school programs and partnerships at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, discusses the Yale Center for British Art's Enhancing Observation Skills program, which she previously managed. In "Whose Objectivity?: Considering Drawing as an Observational Skill," Ursic explains how the program aims to help medical students to better communicate, discard preconceptions, value discovery and questioning, and engage in close looking. Ursic reflects on what she thinks the program participants could gain by incorporating drawing and revealing the assumptions made about art even within an art museum, thus further demonstrating the importance of art in medicine, and art partnerships more generally.

In "The Radical Practice of Contemplative Looking in an Art Museum," Laura Dickstein Thompson, the founding director of education at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), describes how she has incorporated principles of "slow," or contemplative, looking into MASS MoCA's programming through mindfulness-based exercises for consciousness that blend Western cognitive psychology and Eastern philosophies such as Buddhist meditation techniques. Thompson discusses how such practices help visitors remain fully present and resist immediately seeking information, controlling an experience, or predicting results. This leads to unhurried and more meaningful connections with the artwork.

In her essay about her work as a curatorial fellow at the Harvard Art Museums, Correna Cohen details a mapping exercise used by the museum to approach questions of race and identity head on, moving from observing dilemmas of representation in specific works to critical awareness of assumptions and messaging rather than just appreciation of a

work of art. In “Learning a New Landscape: Mapping as Radical Practice in the Museum,” Cohen explains how this exercise helps both student visitors and gallery educators in particular ways, acknowledging that this is not about “fixing” but about understanding and addressing racism within collections.

In “Listening: The Driver of Solutions at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts,” Thomas Bastien, former director of education and wellness; Marilyn Lajeunesse, museum educator at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; and Stephen Legari, art therapist, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, describes the ambitious Sharing the Museum program, which views the museum in all its roles as a place that serves rather than teaches the community. The Naked Tour, led in 2016, exemplifies the program’s guiding principles—openness, responsiveness, attentiveness, and action—by allowing visitors to shape their own experiences and encounters with art, even when they involve visiting the museum without any clothes on.

April Oswald, museum education director at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute (MWPPI), describes how MWPPI’s Art and Yoga program uses sound, touch, and movement to center the art object, cultivating an encounter with the art that sparks curiosity, wonder, and joy. As Oswald explains in “Out of Our Heads: Accentuate the Physical,” the program aims to help visitors meditate on art from a new perspective by engaging their body and senses in ways museums would not otherwise allow them to do, thus reinforcing the museum’s role as a space for relaxation and focus as well as a place for art.

In “Letting Go: Surrendering Authority and Embracing the Non-Museum Expert,” Damon Reaves, the head of education at the National Gallery of Art, encourages us to challenge the idea of the museum as the voice of authority, instead promoting a relaxed control and acknowledgement of others’ expertise. Reaves

This series of essays provides insights into the ways that museum education is growing as a field and the kind of thinking and choices that are involved in the day-to-day lives of museum educators today.

explains how these ideas led to a variety of museum programs that center visitors’ voices and invite in outside collaborators to encourage other ways of thinking and knowing. These multidimensional experiences create a space for convening where multiple voices can be heard, and Reaves shows how this is a key way for museums to stay relevant.

It is an honor to host the What We May Be colloquium series and to serve as one of the editors of this important publication. As the museum field changes, so do the roles of museum professionals. This series of essays provides insights into the ways that museum education is growing as a field and the kind of thinking and choices that are involved in the day-to-day lives of museum educators today. Together, these essays reflect a sincere effort to reshape museum programs so that they are “for someone” and not “about something.”³ I applaud my colleagues in the field for their creativity and courage in leading change in museums and for the important ways they are serving their communities and expanding what museums may be. ■

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

2 A note to the reader that the essays written in this volume reflect the thoughts and ideas from the What We May Be conference that took place in May 2018. Some of our contributors have moved on from their respective roles to other positions.

3 Stephen E. Weil, “From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of American Museums,” *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (Summer 1999), 229–58.

LEARNING IN SILENCE

CORINNE ZIMMERMANN

Independent Consultant; Former Director of Interpretation, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

Silence

In the silence
the wind sings a lullaby
in the silence
you may hear more
silence is what silence is not
silence is awareness
silence is loud.

Mahfooz Ali¹

Before you begin, pause. Close your eyes and take three deep, slow breaths. Take a moment to sit in silence. What do you notice?

I am sitting in an apartment. It's loud. Cars seven stories below me plow through slush, airplanes rumble across the sky. I hear the punctuation of a child's voice, knocking sounds from the apartment upstairs, and a high-pitched whistling sound I think is the wind. Silence is, in fact, loud. And layered. But my noticing is not just aural. As one sense becomes more attuned, another also

wakes up. The backdrop for the cacophony of human sounds is visual. Outside I notice a reservoir covered with ice and the tops of trees swaying in the wind. I am drawn to the spaces in between—the negative spaces between the branches, the pauses in the sounds of the voices and passing cars. I am seeking silence in the noise.

This essay explores the potential role of silence as a vehicle for noticing, communicating, and connecting in art museums. In it I describe the Silent Tour, an annual offering at the Isabella Gardner Museum in Boston from 2015 to 2018, and consider the role that experimental practices in art museums can play in fostering a sense of connection and well-being. I also argue the need for experimental opportunities to expand the possibilities of “what we may be” as art museums and to stretch our own practices as educators. Experimentation allows for risk taking, productive failure, and new possibilities.

Before I continue, a few words on silence. The word “silence” is not neutral; it carries a host of complex meanings. In 1972 the writer Paul Goodman articulated different kinds of silence:

Not speaking and speaking are both human ways of being in the world, and there are kinds and grades of each. There is the dumb silence of slumber or apathy; the sober silence that goes with a solemn animal face; the fertile silence of awareness, pasturing the soul, whence emerge new thoughts; the alive silence of alert perception, ready to say, “This . . . this . . .”; the musical silence that accompanies absorbed activity; the silence of listening to another speak, catching the drift and helping him be clear; the noisy silence of resentment and self-recrimination, loud and subvocal speech but sullen to say it; baffled silence; the silence of peaceful accord with other persons or communion with the cosmos.²

There is also the silence of oppression, the act of silencing. “Silence,” Rebecca Solnit writes, “is what allows people to suffer without recourse, what allows hypocrisies and lies to grow and flourish, crimes to go unpunished. If our voices are essential aspects of our humanity, to be rendered voiceless is to be dehumanized or excluded from one’s humanity.”³ She distinguishes between silence of repression and quietude, the latter of which, for her, defines the space of contemplation and reflection. The silence I am interested in is closer to Solnit’s understanding of quietude, but it is also the “alive silence of alert perception,” and the “silence of peaceful accord with other persons” that Goodman describes.

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum launched the Silent Tour in 2015 as part of the Sanctuary Series, a program I created with my former colleague Jessie Schlosser Smith, which consisted of monthly experiential workshops led by artists, musicians, dancers,

writers, and creative thinkers.⁴ Our hope was that the workshops would allow participants to take a break from the stresses of daily life, rejuvenate, find personal meaning, and connect with one another. Other than sharing with them these goals and museum guidelines, workshop leaders had creative freedom. The Silent Tour was inspired by a concert performed by the Boston-based chamber orchestra A Far Cry, which is celebrated for its surprising programs and lack of hierarchy in its ensemble (there is no conductor). During a concert in 2012, the group performed John Cage’s iconic piece *4’33”* (1952), in which musicians take the stage, ready their instruments to play, and then stand in silence for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. A couple of things usually happen when *4’33”* is performed. Audiences’ expectations are confounded as they experience a sense of anticipation, then confusion, and possibly discomfort. In the place of music, other sounds emerge: the rustle of a program, a cough, whispers, ambient building noises, and, sometimes, what feels like a moment of silence. For Cage, all sounds had the potential to be “music.” In this particular concert, A Far Cry concluded the program with *Moz-Art à la Haydn* by Alfred Schnittke and Joseph Haydn’s *Farewell Symphony*. With ears attuned by the silence, I listened, and perhaps heard, as never before.

In a 1966 interview Cage declared, “No day goes by without my making use of that piece in my life and in my work. I listen to it every day. Yes I do. . . . I don’t sit down to do it; I turn my attention toward it. I realize that it’s going on continuously. So, more and more, my attention, as now, is on it. More than anything else, it’s the source of my enjoyment of life.”⁵ My experience of the concert, and what Cage alludes to, is the power of paying attention, of being fully present. Critic James Pritchett writes, “The most helpful role for *4’33”* is to inspire silence.”⁶ With that in mind, I began designing a tour to explore the concept of shared silence in an art museum.

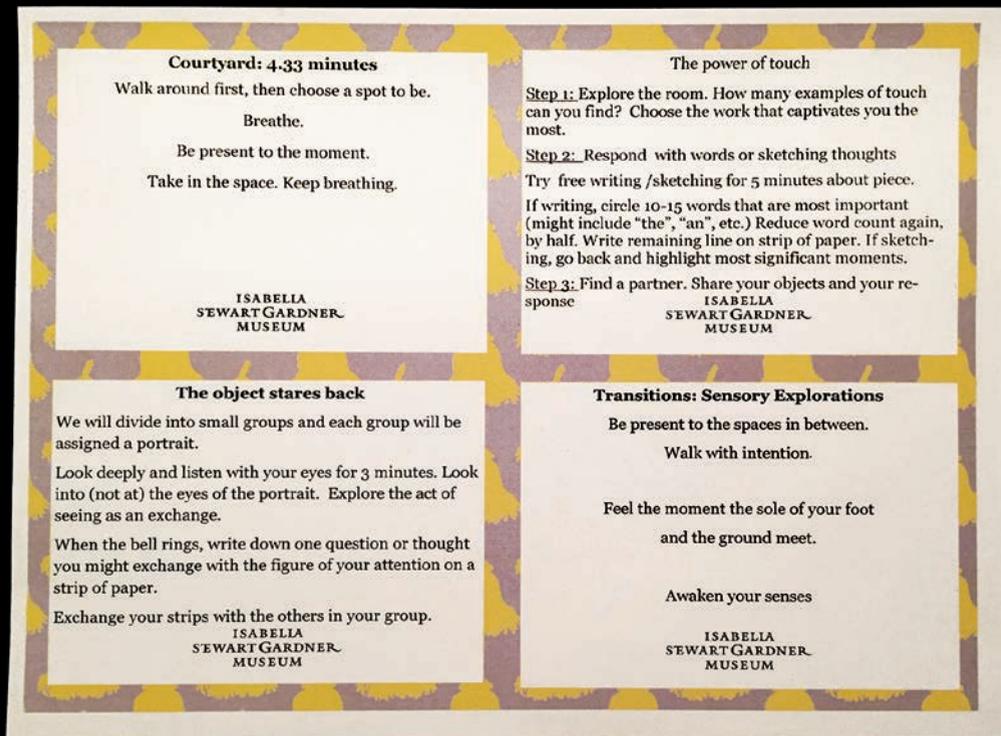
In creating the Silent Tour, I was interested in the intersection between the practices of keeping silent and touring. During museum tours we do a lot of talking. We encourage conversation and dialogue. I wondered, if oral language is removed from the equation, would we listen, hear, and see with heightened awareness? Would we experience the museum, its artworks, and one another in new and surprising ways? I was also inspired by the Gardner Museum itself. When Isabella Stewart Gardner built and installed her museum, she created a multisensory environment surrounding a lively courtyard. Galleries are filled with works of all types of media—textiles, decorative arts, ceramics, paintings, sculpture, and even souvenirs Gardner picked up on her many travels. Instead of organizing artworks according to traditional categories, such as period, genre, artist, and so on, Gardner arranged

her collection to put works of art, often from diverse times and places, in dialogue with one another. The experience is layered—the connections are visual, historical, associative, and more. We do not know for sure what Gardner intended because the collection has no labels, and she didn't share her thinking. In fact, one of her favorite quotes was, "think much, speak little, write nothing."⁷ Visiting the Gardner Museum is, among many other things, an embodied experience in which the senses are stimulated and imagination can be cultivated. When one enters the museum, there is the sense of walking into a different world, an alternative space—one that welcomes personal responses and, for me, encourages creative experimentation.

All three iterations of the Silent Tour took place at night, in the following manner. We began in the Gardner's Education Studio, an

FIG. 1

Examples of prompt cards used during a Silent Tour.



art-making space in the contemporary wing of the museum, where I set expectations for the experience. I explained to participants that this would not be a traditional tour but an experiential one, and that it would mostly be conducted in silence. I let people know that on the tour there would always be an element of improvisation, and I encouraged them to think of the experience as a shared adventure. I explained how I would communicate with them while maintaining my own silence—by sharing cards featuring prompts such as “Transitions: Be present to the spaces in between. Walk with intention. Feel the moment the sole of your foot and the ground meet. Awaken your senses” and “Movement Investigations: Look closely and explore the work of art with small gestures. Choose one gesture that for you captures something essential about the object. We will then create a movement piece. The structure

looks like this: A shares their gesture with B. B reflects A’s gesture back to them. B shares their gesture with C. C reflects B’s gesture back to them, and so on. We will practice once, then to do it again fluidly” (fig. 1). I asked them to notice what it was like to experience a museum in shared silence, to communicate without words.

The quiet part of the tour commenced with a series of warm-ups, beginning with standing in a circle, feeling the ground beneath our feet, standing up straight but relaxed, closing our eyes, and taking three deep inhales and three long, slow exhales. This was an important moment—it brought us together as a group, signaled a moment of transition, and moved us into the space of the tour. To further unite the group, we did a type of shared meditation I once experienced in a workshop with the artist Bibi Calderaro.

FIG. 2

The inner courtyard at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Photo: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.



Still standing in the circle, each person held a cup half filled with water. I began by slowly pouring water from my cup into that of the person next to me, who then poured some from their cup into the cup of the person next to them, and so on until the water completed the circle and came back to me. We concluded by taking a sip from our cups at the same time. Generosity is at the heart of this activity, which also encouraged the group to be present with one another. Additionally, it injected a bit of humor and further signaled that this *really* isn't going to be a typical tour.

With senses attuned, we journeyed from the contemporary wing into the “palace”—built in 1900 and modeled after a Venetian palazzo—which entails walking through a glass corridor, entering a darkened cloister, and arriving at an indoor courtyard filled with plants and fountains. The courtyard almost always creates a “wow” moment for our visitors and the space is particularly enchanting in the evening (fig. 2). The group conducted a slow, meditative walk around the perimeter, after which participants were invited to find a spot and, à la Cage, sit silently for four minutes and thirty-three seconds to tune in to their senses and be in the moment. The end of this, and all activities, was marked by the sound of a singing bowl.

As we moved into the galleries, our time together became more active. Across the series of silent tours, we discussed works of art through various modalities, including gesture, small movements, poetry, and drawing. For each tour I tried something new, but a favorite activity was “the object stares back,” which we used in encounters with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European portraits. Typically, visitors to the museum look at the person represented in a portrait. We act upon the work of art through distanced observation. In his book *The Object Stares Back*, art historian James Elkins proposes a notion of reciprocity between the seer and the seen. “Ultimately, seeing,” he writes, “alters

the thing that is seen and transforms the seer. Seeing is metamorphosis. . . . Seeing is being seen.”⁸ The space between subjective and objective begins to dissolve. In the gallery, participants were divided into groups of three and assigned a portrait. The prompt was to look into the sitter’s eyes for three minutes and then, on a strip of paper, to write down a question they might ask the person. Queries included:

- What are the significant concerns and worries of the people during your time in history?
- Is there anything from your past you regret?
- How does it feel to be an alive thing?
- Are you comfortable in your role?
- Are you always as direct and forthright as your gaze suggests?

There was often a lot of smiling and gesturing after group members shared their questions with one another. As one participant wrote, “The portrait was speaking to me!” By inviting us to read beneath the surface and move beyond attributes, the activity engendered a sense of curiosity and connection.

After the more active portion of the tour, the tempo changed again. We headed into a quiet gallery and, sitting in a circle, I broke the silence by reading aloud the poem “Keeping Quiet” (1968) by Pablo Neruda.

Keeping Quiet
Pablo Neruda

Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still.

For once on the face of the earth,
let’s not speak in any language;
let’s stop for one second,
and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment

without rush, without engines;
we would all be together
in a sudden strangeness.
Fisherman in the cold sea
would not harm whales
and the man gathering salt
would look at his hurt hands.
Those who prepare green wars,
wars with gas, wars with fire,
victories with no survivors,
would put on clean clothes
and walk about with their brothers
in the shade, doing nothing.

What I want should not be confused
with total inactivity.
Life is what it is about;
I want no truck with death.

If we were not so single-minded
about keeping our lives moving,
and for once could do nothing,
perhaps a huge silence
might interrupt this sadness
of never understanding ourselves
and of threatening ourselves with death.
Perhaps the earth can teach us
as when everything seems dead
and later proves to be alive.

Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.

Then we sat quietly together for twelve deep breaths. That moment of shared silence was one of calm and intimacy. There was a palpable sense of peace and connectedness as we tuned in to ourselves, our surroundings, and a shared sense of being together in a group. Often participants closed their eyes as we breathed in harmony.

For the final reflective activity, I gently broke the silence again by inviting participants to write on a strip of paper what silence means to them. Each person then read their response aloud, creating, in effect, a group poem about silence. Examples of these statements included:

- Silence is a condition to begin BEING, while in silence DEPTH of our own existence becomes visible.
- Silence means filling up your senses with everything around you.
- Silence=deepened connection.
- Silence means no need for chitchat and can also mean sweet communication.
- Silence is an opportunity to notice the world you've been missing.

The arc of the tour—from sitting individually in silence, to engaged (but silent) participation, and back to shared silence—contributed to a moment in which we listened with open hearts and generosity as we each read what silence meant to us. At the conclusion of the tour, people often hugged and smiled as they left the space we created together.

The audience for the Silent Tour was varied. Participants ranged in age from eight to sixty-five years and older, and included college students, members, and first-time visitors. Sessions were limited to fifteen people and were fully enrolled. What is the value of a tour like this for participants? On reflection cards, we asked participants to jot down a few words capturing how they felt before and after the tour. As example responses below indicate, we learned that during sessions participants often moved from a “shoulders up” to a “shoulders down” state of being:

| BEFORE | AFTER |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Anxious, jumpy mind, tunnel vision | Expansive, quiet head |
| Excited, curious, a bit hassled | Tranquil, happy, inspired, full, warm, joyous, and peaceful |
| Wondering | Peaceful |
| Curious, glad | Eager to try more silence! |

We also asked participants to share memorable moments. Responses included:

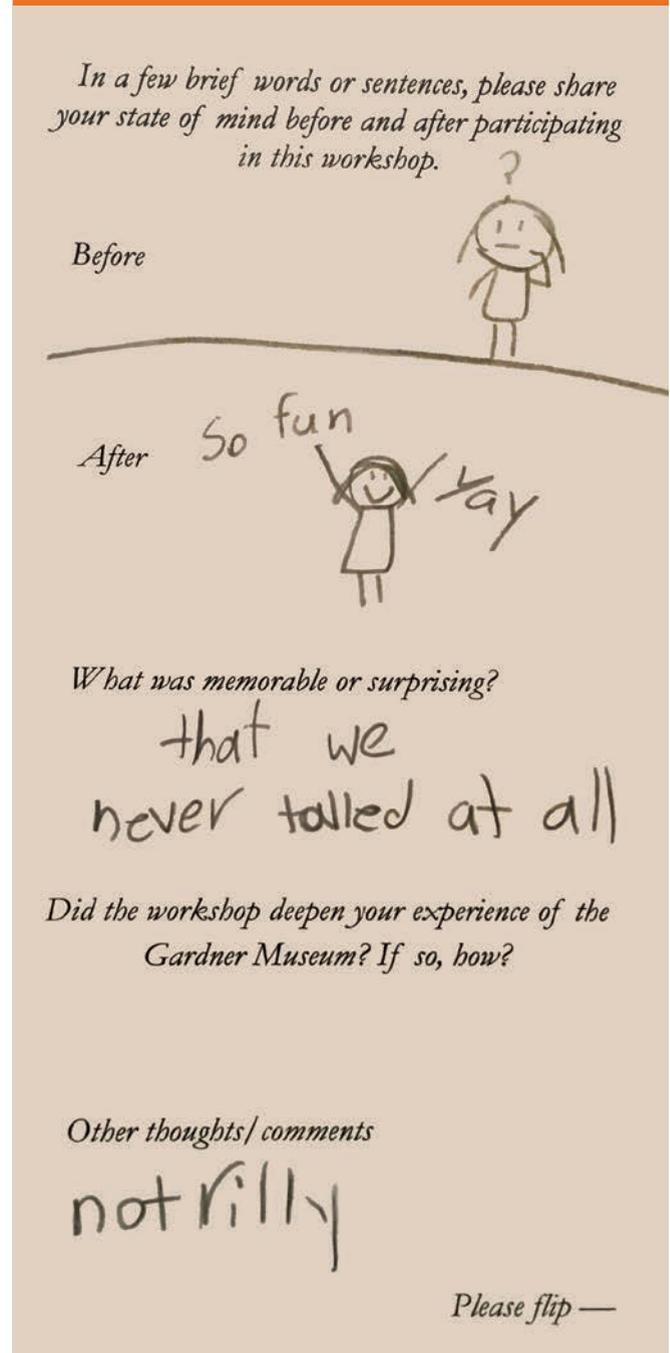
- Feeling confident that what I was thinking/feeling about the art was “right.”
- How quickly time flew by. How much I noticed!
- It is strangely surprising to notice again and again how beautiful the Gardner Museum is.
- Expecting to be a more solitary experience, surprised by how close I felt to group at the end.
- How much we communicated without words!
- That we never talked at all! (This was from the eight-year-old.)

While preparing this essay, I was curious what participants remembered about the Silent Tour one to three years later. I emailed our participant list and the few responses I received were illuminating:

- I was happy to feel so awake in the nighttime.
- In the prescribed absence of voices, both the works of art and the very building—the museum—get a chance to speak more loudly than they do under “normal” circumstances. When the job is to simply be in communion with a work—to “listen” to it rather than just watch it—one is able to experience it in a deeper way. In silence, one is better able to feel and understand the connections between works and the sanctuary space they inhabit.
- I was intrigued when I saw your silent tour listed because I thought it could solve a problem with commentary in art museums. As the de Goncourt brothers put it, “Perhaps nothing in the world hears more stupid things than a painting in a museum.” I think the problem occurs because, if the work of art is a masterpiece, a commentator would need the tongue of Shakespeare to say something adequate about it. If something is ineffable, well, it’s ineffable. So I thought your idea of

FIG. 3

A response card from an eight-year-old participant.



In our complex and sometimes fractured world, art museums have the potential to offer an expansive array of experiences that help bring diverse audiences into proximity and connection with one another. Discourse is absolutely necessary, but so are other modes of communication.

a silent tour was an ingenious solution to this problem. What made your tour different from a contemplative hour that I might spend by myself in a museum was that your tour was both structured and social. The structure encouraged focus on my part. . . . Your questions on cards with written responses encouraged communication with other tour members without breaking the spell of silence.

-I LOVED your silent tour. It was magical, mystical, restorative, and refreshing! Experiencing the museum with you as our silent guide gave me a new perspective on the art and space. It was a relief to simply look at (and write about) the art rather than feel like I needed to talk or listen to somebody else. At the end of a long day, there was something so peaceful about being asked to be silent and not engage with others verbally. We are immersed in words all day, so it was powerful to experience silence for a length of time.

So what does all of this mean for museums? In order for art museums to remain relevant we must be responsive to our visitors and the times in which we live. LaPlaca Cohen's Culture Track reports offer compelling insights into the changing landscape of culture and what those changes mean for our institutions today. According to a 2017 report, the primary motivations for cultural participation, across generations, include having fun (81%), feeling less stressed (76%), experiencing new things (76%), interacting with others (67%), and feeling transported (67%).⁹ In designing tours, learnings from this study inform my thinking. Significant for the Gardner, too, is the finding that if an institution seems unchanging, frequent attendees are likely to stay away. Because of the dictates of Gardner's will, the museum's permanent collection and the installation of objects cannot be significantly altered. A program such as the Silent Tour is one of the ways we keep our collection fresh.

Increasingly, art museums are thinking expansively about how to be places for visitors to decompress and to foster social connections. Interesting initiatives and research investigating the relationship between art museums and well-being are developing.¹⁰ In fall 2018 it was announced that doctors in Montreal could soon prescribe museum visits to patients dealing with stress and anxiety.¹¹ Helen J. Chatterjee and Paul M. Camic offer evidence that museums can play a positive role in helping constituents form social bonds, thus reducing feelings of social isolation.¹²

Participant responses confirm that the experience of the Silent Tour was restorative and that the group of mostly strangers felt bonded by the experience. In part this resulted because they were fellow travelers on a unique experience; but I also wonder, did we listen to one another better? In his 2011 TED Conference talk, sound consultant Julian Treasure warned, "We are losing our

listening.”¹³ We live in a world bombarded with noise on multiple channels and with many distractions. Treasure passionately argues for “a conscious listening world—a world of understanding, a world of connection, and a world of peace.”¹⁴ To cultivate listening skills, he recommends, among other things, finding moments of silence, paying attention to one another, and showing appreciation and acknowledgment. I would argue that the structured nonverbal communication experienced on the Silent Tour can promote better listening in several ways: participants make more eye contact and are more attentive to nonverbal cues, they demonstrate understanding expressively, they need to pay more attention to understand what is happening, and it is difficult to interrupt.

The Silent Tour was created in response to a need at the Gardner to activate our collections in new ways and encourage repeat visitation. The tour also became a laboratory for teaching. Several of the activities developed for the experience are now used with other groups. Silently walking, sitting contemplatively in the museum’s courtyard, or nonverbally communicating using different modalities such as gesture add positive dimensions to tours with high school students and to the specialized tours we offer healthcare providers. A silent tour participant recently wrote that the evening at the art museum “embodied everything I hope to feel . . . a sense of calm, wonder, curiosity, and awareness through my senses.”

Historically, the field of art museum education has been dominated by spoken words. From lecturing to conversations designed to encourage personal meaning making, we have talked. As we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, it is compelling to ask ourselves “what we may be.” In our complex and sometimes fractured world, art museums have the potential to offer an expansive array of experiences that help bring diverse audiences into proximity

and connection with one another. Discourse is absolutely necessary, but so are other modes of communication. By being “radical” we can be cutting-edge, we can be disruptors, we can be profound. Art museums can be testaments to human experience, creativity, and imagination. By challenging ourselves to continue experimenting with and expanding our practices, by disrupting conventional modes of learning, we have the potential to create profoundly meaningful experiences for and with our visitors. ■

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**WHOSE
OBJECTIVITY?
CONSIDERING
DRAWING AS AN
OBSERVATIONAL
SKILL**

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In 2018 the Clark Art Institute hosted *What We May Be: Radical Practice*, a colloquium that invited a group of museum educators to consider how their field was changing in the current social climate. Stemming from the Clark's education philosophy rooted in humanist psychology, the colloquium was a space for "thinking about thinking." Creating a forum for metacognition allowed museum education practitioners to step away from their programs and institutions and reflect on their teaching ethos. Humanism posits that people are motivated by the inherent need to self-actualize, and the Clark colloquium offered the space and time for museum educators to reflect on their current practice and to explore questions about and possibilities for moving the field forward. Similar to how museum educators challenge audiences to lean into their discomfort in order to learn, colloquium participants embraced their discomfort by examining the social and emotional relevance of their work.

For six years I worked in the education department at the Yale Center for

British Art (YCBA) to provide visual art enrichment programs, collaborative teaching opportunities, and open-ended learning experiences for diverse audiences across Yale University and New Haven's greater communities. Through tours and programs, I asked and enabled visitors to look more closely, make connections, and consider the artworks on view in the galleries as a lens to engage in historical and contemporary discourses. In preparation for the Clark's colloquium, I wrote a presentation referencing historical and scientific research in support of teaching observation skills from British paintings with ambiguous narratives. As the first day of the colloquium progressed, colleagues openly and thoughtfully shared their challenges, questioned their thinking, and demonstrated their vulnerabilities. Feeling empowered by the community of respect and support in examining what we do as museum educators, I decided to share a fundamental question I had about the YCBA's Enhancing Observation Skills program: "Why not teach basic observational drawing techniques to

improve the observation skills of medical students?”

This seemingly innocuous question about a specific program was an opportunity for me to explore the importance of drawing and its relationship to my teaching practice. Colloquium colleagues helped me navigate through programmatic goals to direct the reflective lens on myself and accept that I was a museum educator and an artist, not only one or the other. What started as a presentation to colleagues about a program I regularly taught evolved into a deeper self-reflection on my practice. Through the seemingly pedestrian nature of my question, an understanding of myself and my work as a unique museum educator, artist, and lifelong learner revealed a different adjective with which to define my practice: radical.

You see, but you do not observe.
—Sherlock Holmes in Sir Arthur
Conan Doyle, *A Scandal in Bohemia*

The Enhancing Observation Skills program was developed in 1999 for Yale medical students by Linda Friedlaender, senior curator of education at the YCBA, and Dr. Irwin Braverman, professor emeritus of dermatology at the Yale School of Medicine. Through a study of the program, Friedlaender and Braverman demonstrated that medical students who looked at and discussed artworks in a museum developed stronger skills in observation and objective description compared to their peers who did not. Students who participated in the museum intervention were found to successfully transfer observation and communication skills when visually examining photographs of patients with medical disorders.

Still implemented today, the program’s typical procedure asks participants to objectively describe what they see in an artwork. From the “visual facts,” the “observer” uses words to describe and develop a hypothesis

about the “meaning of the artwork.”

Participants work in small groups with a museum educator to facilitate close-looking experiences. The group of four participants is separated to independently look at one artwork for a sustained period of time. Without reading the label or receiving an introduction to the artwork, each participant studies a different painting on their own through concentrated looking—no art or art history background is needed, and they are asked not to use smartphones. After approximately twelve minutes of sustained independent looking, the museum educator asks participants to give a visual inventory of the artwork. Each willing individual takes a turn describing the artwork in as much objective detail as possible. They are gently reoriented by the museum educator if their observation veers more toward an interpretation or assumption. After exhausting the visual facts that can be seen by all, participants share their interpretations and draw conclusions about the artwork’s narrative supported only by what they can see in the artwork. The length of the gallery observation exercise can be adjusted, although thirty minutes per artwork seems to be just right for an average adult’s cognitive and physical attention spans.

Since the Friedlaender and Braverman study was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2001, this unique opportunity for medical students to improve their observation skills continues to be well documented. Many medical schools partner with museums and art galleries to practice observation skills with the goal of improving the diagnostic skills of medical students and practitioners at all career stages. Multiple studies underscore the belief that observational skills can be refined by looking at and discussing visual art with others. Viewing and talking about an ambiguous artwork creates an opportunity for individuals to have thoughtful, powerful, and difficult yet

Looking closely at an artwork with an ambiguous narrative becomes a springboard for discussing and reflecting on multiple points of view, making space for and facilitating the critical consideration of competing conclusions.

crucial conversations. Audrey Shafer, director of the Medicine and the Muse Program at the Stanford Center for Biomedical Ethics and professor of anesthesiology, perioperative, and pain medicine, promotes the importance of integrating the arts and humanities into medical education. Shafer says, “The practice of medicine is a human endeavor. The arts enable us to think more critically about what medicine is and who we are, as well as helping us to understand the perspective of the patient, to have empathy for people who are ill.”

Additionally, moving outside the school and hospital environments allows for new ideas to animate thinking and conversations, and visiting a museum sets the stage for organic collaborative learning. Beginning with taking a visual inventory of an artwork, independent sustained looking evolves into citing and articulating evidential support for a theory. Looking closely at an artwork with an ambiguous narrative becomes a springboard for discussing and reflecting on multiple points of view, making space for and facilitating the critical consideration of competing conclusions. Topics that these discussions frequently generate include how people’s experiences inform their perspectives, revealing and acknowledging our own blind spots and implicit biases, building empathy,

and realizing that more than one perspective can be authentic and correct.

One type of bias that groups must acknowledge comes from the language used in these exercises. Bias is inherent in language, and English, the primary language used in these exercises, can often be gender biased. Blatant prejudice is easily recognized in today’s use of language, yet hidden messages—words or phrases with subtle and unnecessary negative connotations—are not as easily recognized. Vernacular and colloquial sayings can perpetuate the perceived superiority or inferiority of various groups of people. Terms and phrases can change over time. For example, it is not acceptable to use “he” as a default pronoun. “Mankind” and “manmade,” two more examples of biased language, can be replaced by “humanity” and “manufactured.” Language is charged, and these biases are difficult to avoid, therefore it is important to remain vigilantly aware. An inherent challenge in language is that each observer has their own worldview that determines what and how observations are made. This challenges the claim that one can make an “objective observation” and raises the question of whether any observation is actually unbiased.

The art of drawing which is of more real importance to the human race than that of writing . . . should be taught to every child just as writing is.

—John Ruskin

One possible solution for removing the influence of semantics from the facilitated gallery observation experience is to begin asking participants to observe and analyze paintings by sketching rather than writing their responses. Museum education does not hesitate to invite children of all ages to sketch and draw, so why is it that we do not ask medical students to draw their observations?

If participants have the fine motor skills to print or write in cursive, they can physically sketch. Child development recognizes that a child learns to hold and move a crayon across a surface when they are around thirteen to fifteen months old. This stage of random scribbling evolves into more controlled line work as a child advances to creating curves, zigzags, shapes, and so on. Marks evolve from the scribbling stage to the schematic stage as the marks needed for written language are continually refined. Viktor Lowenfeld writes that “natural development will cease unless a conscious decision is made to improve drawing skills” around the age of twelve to fourteen years. It is often at this same age when modern schooling and hypercritical self-awareness categorize one’s natural tendency toward drawing and art in general as more of an elective.

In mid-nineteenth-century America, art instruction of a “very primary character was introduced into the public-school curriculum” and early iterations of “school exercises for the education of the eye and the training of the hand” in support of American industriousness were advocated by educators, including artist and educator Rembrandt Peale. Throughout the twentieth century, art education in the United States focused on developing students’ practical skills of observational drawing, yet, in the 1980s, arts education opportunities began to decline. Student exposure to the creative arts became more limited, and those with a personal interest in the arts had to actively seek out opportunities for practice. Since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, the emphasis on standardized testing has coincided with “notable declines in school-facilitated arts exposure.” Even though the arts are recognized as imperative for twenty-first century global citizenship, art education remains a prime target for cuts by education administrators and policymakers who prioritize tasks and skills. In 2009 governors and state education commissioners from

forty-eight states, two territories, and the District of Columbia launched the Common Core State Standards “to recognize the value of consistent, real-world learning goals, ensuring all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life.” By 2015 forty-three states and the District of Columbia had adopted and maintained the Common Core State Standards with new challenges brought forth yearly.

One of the most cited criticisms of the Common Core State Standards is that teachers are no longer required to instruct students in cursive writing. A fundamental element of early childhood instruction since the 1820s, “cursive handwriting naturally develops sensory skills. Through repetition the children begin to understand how much force needs to be applied to the pencil and paper, the positioning of the pencil to paper at the correct angle, and motor planning to form each letter in fluid motion from left to right. This physical and spatial awareness allows them to write, but more importantly, builds the neural foundation of sensory skills needed for a myriad of everyday tasks such as buttoning, fastening, tying shoes, picking up objects, copying words from blackboards, and most importantly, reading.” Arguments in support of students learning to write in cursive also move beyond advocating for more refined fine motor and sensory skills. Script is faster to write than the stop-start-stop-start rhythm of hand printing, easier to read for students with dyslexia, and offers an opportunity for students to connect to the past by being able to read handwritten notes or historical documents from previous generations.

The ability to use one’s hands in a deliberate and coordinated way suggests an evolutionary relationship between developing fine motor control and cognitive skills. The manual dexterity of the human hand is utilized in both drawing and writing, and its contribution is greater than an aesthetically

pleasing signature. The skill of writing legibly strengthens an individual's ability to communicate by requiring proper sequencing, spacing, and learned spelling patterns. Clear visuals and diagrams are also valuable elements of today's K–12 STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) curriculum.

According to Anita Taylor, dean of the Bath School of Art and Design, “As a primary visual language, essential for communication and expression, drawing is as important as the development of written and verbal skills. The need to understand the world through visual means would seem more acute than ever; images transcend the barriers of language, and enhance communications in an increasingly globalized world.”

Scientific thinking is rooted in this type of observational work. It is through observation that we gain information. An observation can ignite curiosity, document the results of an experiment, and establish a visual record. Jennifer Landin, professor of biology and art education at North Carolina State University, attests: “Observation skills are crucial. The abilities to see without bias and to focus

Drawing from observation, which art schools have long taught as a foundational skill, is the basis for critical thinking and creative problem-solving inherent in art making.

on detail and pattern require training, not talent.” Because medical students are trained to look for patterns and anomalies in complex visual imagery, “art training could be helpful across many specialties, especially ones like ophthalmology, dermatology, and radiology, where diagnosis and treatment plans are

based primarily on direct observation,” said Gil Binenbaum, an associate professor of ophthalmology in the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and a pediatric eye surgeon in the division of ophthalmology at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Learning to draw is really a matter of learning to see—to see correctly—and that means a good deal more than merely looking with the eye.

—Kimon Nicolaïdes, *The Natural Way to Draw: A Working Plan for Art Study*

Drawing from observation, which art schools have long taught as a foundational skill, is the basis for critical thinking and creative problem-solving inherent in art making. Introductory and basic drawing courses challenge students to look closely in order to transcend preconceived notions about what they see. Robert Reed Jr., artist and faculty member of the Yale School of Art's Department of Painting and Printmaking for almost fifty years, often repeated the following direction to drawing students: “Look at what [you are] drawing at least 80 percent of the time and look at the paper only 20 percent.”

Drawing from observation brings attention to what one is looking at, as well as what one is not seeing; it is about the process and not the final product. Likewise, observation is a process of discovery and questioning in order to uncover information and discard preconceptions. This aligns with the processes of critical thinking and understanding. We bring our prior experiences, belief systems, and cultural histories with us to all we do. Language shapes, as well as inhibits, creative thinking. Our experiences inform our perceptions, and language is used to articulate them. Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander write, in *The Art of Possibility*, “We perceive only the sensations we are programmed to receive, and our awareness is

further restricted by the fact that we recognize only those for which we have mental maps or categories.” Drawing can inform what a person sees, and active observation informs what descriptive words a person chooses to use.

Friedlaender and Braverman’s study found that a close-looking museum intervention improves the descriptive vocabulary of a medical student. This finding has long been demonstrated by an exercise used in many introductory drawing courses. The activity first asks a person to write a description of an object. Next, the person is asked to draw the same object for the same amount of time. Lastly, the person is asked to again write a description of the same object. Empirical evidence generated by this exercise consistently shows an increased use of descriptive words and metaphors in the post-drawing text. Both drawing and writing are communicative processes. There is no need to exclude one when both are descriptively enriching.

It is better to be high-spirited even though one makes more mistakes, than to be narrow-minded and all too prudent.

—Vincent van Gogh

Since participating in the colloquium, I focus less on the limitations of a museum experience, and instead trust the creative process. From my perspective as an educator and artist, the process of participating in the Enhancing Observation Skills program is no longer distinct from teaching the program. Both roles contribute to the continual process of discovering, questioning, learning, and considering the plurality of individual perspectives. In returning to my question, I began to see that I was not practicing what I asked my groups to do. I regularly told students and museum visitors that every person is an expert in their experiences and

has much to contribute. I often described each of us as lifelong learners and artists, contributing our individual thoughts and ideas to a larger collective “experience.” I emphasized that each person has agency in

For me, gallery teaching is an active, iterative process, much like art making.

deciding how and what to share. As skilled as I am at inviting and facilitating deep thinking and discussion, I needed to acknowledge my personal agency, curiosity, and contributions as a facilitator and cultivate my own learning. I was unaware of how tightly I was holding on to a construct of perfectionism for myself while wholeheartedly believing that I was empowering participants in my programs.

For me, gallery teaching is an active, iterative process, much like art making. I must be fully present and open to responding to participants as I simultaneously explore my own experimental and critical thinking each step of the way. In education circles, it is often stated that the best teachers are the best students, and I believed myself to be a continual student of those I teach. What my colleagues at the What We May Be colloquium helped me realize is that I need to be a student of myself, of my own learning, experiences, teaching, successes, and challenges. Since those few days at the Clark, I have continued to reflect on my work in hopes of developing a deeper understanding of “me, the student of museum education” actively learning, collaborating, and experimenting with “me, the student of art.” The realization that I am a lifelong student of museum education, art, and art making—just as I am a contributor, and a lifelong learner, no different from my students—was radical for me.

In the rapidly changing era of COVID-19 and the heartbreaking aftermath of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many other sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, I acknowledge the long history of anti-Blackness, white supremacy, systemic oppression, and structural racism in this country. Just as biases of gender influence our language, racism pervades our society, shaping the way we interpret the world around us and interact with one another. Despite how each of us might feel regarding our own objectivity in the face of racism, we all live, work, and connect within a system of structural racism. For me, it is essential to acknowledge that I have benefitted from and been complicit in this racism. Moving forward, I commit to challenging racial bias and racism in my work as an artist, an educator, and a human being. With humility, I hold myself accountable to make space for and uplift voices and perspectives that have not been heard. ■

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THE RADICAL PRACTICE OF CONTEMPLATIVE LOOKING IN AN ART MUSEUM

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Korean Buddhist Zen master Soen Sa Nim would begin leading a meditation by holding a stick above his head. He asked his audience, “Do you see this?” Then he banged the stick on a table and asked, “Do you hear this?” The Soen master offered this practice to bring attention to the process of seeing and hearing “before thinking sets in and the mind secretes thoughts.” If I were to perform this exercise with you using a work of art in a museum, it is likely that your mind would conjure up numerous thoughts in an attempt to assign meaning to the object. Without first being in the moment and simply enjoying the object for its aesthetic appeal, you might begin to assess the formal qualities of the artwork, recall how it is referenced in art history, and analyze the messages embedded in it. These instantaneous reactions challenge our ability to be fully present with an experience. As mindfulness scholar Jon Kabat-Zinn notes, “Thoughts, interpretations, and emotions pour in so quickly following any and every experience—and as expectations even before the experience arises—that we can hardly say that we were

‘there’ at all for the original moment of seeing, the original moment of hearing.”

Driving this need to promptly make sense of a work of art is perception, which is when our minds work on organizing our surroundings using an analytical thinking process. According to Lisbeth Lipari, professor of communications at Denison University in Granville, Ohio: “We encounter, in each nanosecond of our lives, billions of sensations, some of which we are aware and many, many more of which we are not. The vast majority of these sensations are ignored by our conscious mind, while those that we recognize and name become perceptions—categorized sensations of which we are consciously aware.”

Perception is a natural impulse of the mind, and therefore it can be assumed that many museumgoers hardly ever just “see the stick” or just “hear the stick,” without jumping immediately into interpretation or critical analysis. Further exacerbating these habits are

visitors' expectations of what they "should" do in a museum, and their impulse to perhaps move quickly through the experience to see everything on view. Moreover, museumgoers who are habituated to approaching any object or experience with an analytical lens may find it challenging to simply sit with an object and not probe it for meaning. In order to devote focused attention to an experience one has to "ignore the zillions of other sensations competing for awareness." This would mean monitoring one's thinking, not only to control the instinct to perceive, but also to be alert to other thoughts that are irrelevant to the current experience, such as planning for the next activities of the day and mentally rehearsing or reviewing thoughts about personal matters.

At the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASSMoCA) we know that our 250,000 square feet of gallery space can be overwhelming to take in at a fast pace (fig. 1). Therefore, we have designed programming that demonstrates the value of giving time to let art reveal itself before

cognition takes place; like warming up one's muscles before exercising, an unhurried yet conscious initial encounter with works of art can prepare the mind for more comprehensive interpretations later on. One way to increase alertness involves "slow looking" to move "beyond first impressions towards more immersive, prolonged experiences that unfold slowly over time." We refer to slow looking as "contemplative looking" to more accurately describe our approach, which employs mindfulness-based insight exercises to cultivate consciousness and build understandings of art by harnessing one's personal knowledge and experiences. Our insight exercises are modeled on Western cognitive psychology and Eastern philosophies, such as centuries-old Buddhist meditation techniques, and include—but are not limited to—guided visualizations, slow walking, and observations of breathing. Here we encourage museumgoers to gently quiet their minds, be alert to distractions, and, when the mind drifts from the experience, bring their attention back to the work of art. As a result of contemplative looking,

FIG. 1

MASS MoCA complex.
Photo: Douglas Mason



interpretations are not necessarily conditioned by outside factors such as interpretive materials or tour guide information. Rather, responses are formed with heightened attention to the art itself, in theory leading to a more personalized appreciation and comprehension of art.

In this essay I outline two mindfulness practices based in Eastern spiritual traditions, Zen koans and the Taoist practice of non-doing, which support the notion of slow, contemplative looking as means for museumgoers to pursue insights into and cultivate meaningful experiences with art. I also briefly describe some of the understandable barriers to performing mindfulness in a museum context. I should mention upfront, however, that I am not making a case for eliminating interpretation in museums. Rather, I am exploring means by which museums can share interpretive authority with visitors and broaden the use of art to include opportunities to improve wellness and cognition. Therefore, it is my intention in this essay to give space to reflect on contemplative looking theory and practice, and not necessarily to prescribe specific solutions, which will require additional experimentation and extensive evaluation.

Nature Does Not Hurry, Yet Everything Is Accomplished

While there are numerous philosophies espousing meaningful ways to experience art, I have narrowed the scope here to an examination of two that support the practice of mindfulness as a means to produce fertile interpretive outcomes and transformative art experiences. Koans—which traditionally take the form of written poems or stories used in Zen Buddhism to instill a sense of enlightenment—offer an opportunity to explore art and ideas without having to be engaged in conscious cognition. Indeed, koans often frustrate these attempts; a koan instead teaches a meditator about something without a direct search for meaning.

This is one example of a koan by Zen teacher Yanguan: “One day, Yanguan called to his assistant, ‘Bring me the rhinoceros fan.’ The assistant said, ‘It is broken.’ Yanguan said, ‘In that case, bring me the rhinoceros.’” The messages expressed in this koan suggest that a solution to a problem may not be obvious and it may be better to accept the unknown. As John Tarrant, director of the Pacific Zen Institute in Santa Rosa, California, writes, a koan “doesn’t require you to know where you are going, or need a solution that makes sense to the problem . . . it doesn’t teach you to assemble or make something that didn’t exist before.”

An exemplification of the principle of koans applied to the visual arts is found in a light installation by contemporary artist James Turrell (fig. 2). As scholar Arden Reed suggests in *Slow Art*, Turrell works with light to “produce visual koans” with the “aim to make our responses to everyday surroundings more skeptical and supple.” Like a written koan, the activity of visual perception questions social and personal constructs of reality. Turrell intends for the viewer to take pleasure in the experience of perception but also to be aware of the inherent pitfalls of our own minds. “We form our perceptual world and then inhabit it, according to the limits of our thinking. I don’t deal with perceptual limits given to us as creatures, but the limits we’ve given ourselves.”

Turrell’s works, like koans, have a noted spiritual intentionality, as he aligns the sensation of perception to our understandings of the physical universe. Michael Govan, director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, suggests a connection between Turrell’s work and the Buddhist practice of perception: “Isolating and shaping the phenomena of light in space and time through our perception, his art collapses the distance between the perceiving subject and the object of perception—akin to the Buddhist meditative practice of merging outside and

inside to promote receptivity to a more spiritual, universal nature.” Like a koan, the light also serves as a visual prompt to inspire one to let go of the activities of the mind, and for intuition to draw conclusions about the work of art.

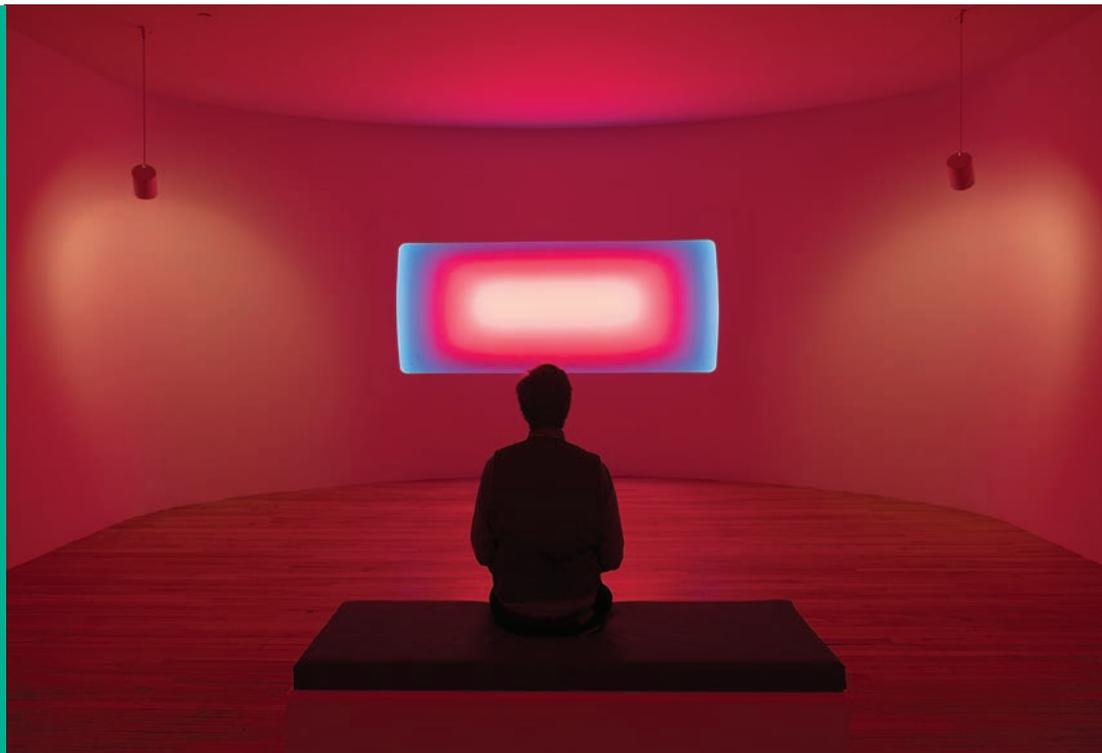
To visit Turrell’s *Hind Sight* (1984), currently on view at MASS MoCA, visitors enter a dark room where they must wait for around fifteen minutes for their eyes to adjust in order to perceive a muted perception of light. Imagine what could happen in that space of time if one were to devote it to a meditative practice rather than to one’s own rambling thoughts. Treating Turrell’s works as visual koans might bring about “the surprise that art offers: inside unpredictability you will find beauty,” as Tarrant teaches. He continues: “Koans light up a life that may have been dormant in you: They hold out the possibility of transformation even if you are trying to address unclear or apparently insoluble problems.”

While a koan is a literal object on which to meditate and focus attention to receive a message without consciously thinking about it, “non-doing” is a sentiment found in many Eastern spiritual practices promoting a similar mindset. The Tao Te Ching (the basis of Taoist religion) is an ancient Chinese poetic text ascribed to Lao Tzu that provides meaningful statements about how to live one’s life and, in particular, practice non-doing. The Taoist proclamation “when nothing is done, nothing is left undone” advises that one doesn’t have to work so hard to find meaning. As spiritual teacher and clinical psychologist Ram Dass notes:

Lao Tsu [*sic*] taught that all straining, all striving are not only vain but counterproductive. One should endeavor to do nothing (wu-wei). But what does this mean? It means not to literally do nothing, but to discern and follow the natural forces—to follow and shape the flow of events and not to pit oneself against the

FIG. 2

James Turrell
(American, b.
1943), *Dissolve*
(*Curved Wide Glass*),
2017. Dimensions
variable. MASS
MoCA, Collection of
Hudson C. Lee. ©
James Turrell. Photo:
Florian Holzherr



natural order of things. First and foremost, to be spontaneous in one's actions. In this sense the Taoist doctrine of wu-wei can be understood as a way of mastering circumstances by understanding their nature or principal, and then shaping one's actions in accordance with these.

Another way to look at non-doing is from a Buddhist perspective, as described by renowned integrated medicine physician and mindfulness advocate Deepak Chopra: "You stop investing yourself in thinking, because Buddha teaches that you haven't been in control of your mind anyway. The mind is a series of fleeting, impermanent events, and

Like a written koan, the activity of visual perception questions social and personal constructs of reality.

trying to ground yourself in impermanence is an illusion." To summarize, non-doing is a phenomenological approach that invites an openness to one's mind and experiences while simultaneously emphasizing a resistance to seeking out information or controlling situations and thoughts.

Applying the sentiment of non-doing to arts engagement involves approaching a work of art without an agenda, without attempting to manage the experience or predict the results. An example of non-doing at MASS MoCA was an event organized for the annual international Slow Art Day, held in April 2018. Participants were invited to choose a work of art in the museum's galleries with which to have a solitary contemplative looking experience. They spent ten minutes in front of their chosen work observing and contemplating, but not necessarily

interpreting. The participants were asked to keep track of their thinking during the experience, to consider their judgments, their questions, and whatever bubbled up for them.

Having experimented with this exercise myself, I recall my exchange with a small framed postcard reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* as part of an installation by Dawn DeDeaux (fig. 3). I initially focused my attention on where my eyes moved across the image and how my body felt in the gallery before letting go of thinking to simply stand in front of the work. When my mind wandered, I was brought back to non-doing by reminding myself to look at the work; like a gong or bell is used in a traditional meditation practice, the image helped to break the thought process. At the conclusion of my looking, I reviewed the experience and consciously initiated cognition to assemble my sensory perceptions with my own thoughts and knowledge about the *Mona Lisa*, Da Vinci, and DeDeaux. Instead of simply interpreting the postcard as a picture of the *Mona Lisa*, I reflected on the layers of meaning that could be ascribed to the object, from its historical relevance to the context in which DeDeaux had placed it. This is not to say that I wouldn't have come to this conclusion without slowing down to contemplate, but that, because of it, I was able to broaden my understanding of the artwork. Also as a result of contemplative looking, I physically experienced a sense of calmness; psychologically, I felt deep satisfaction and confidence in my own thinking.

At the conclusion of the slow looking group experience, we gathered, and each person talked about their chosen piece. Interestingly, we never told participants information about the artist, the piece, or the artist's intention until the end of the experience, yet each one was able to present a clear overview of the work. It appears the quality and quantity of time they had to devote to contemplative

looking was an asset to the interpretative outcome. One participant noticed the impact of devoting longer time to interpreting an artwork, telling me, “If I hadn’t slowed down and paid attention, I would have walked right by it.” Additionally, with the encouragement to slow down and be mindfully engaged in the experience, most Slow Art Day participants concluded this art viewing exercise with more relaxed, confident, and even spiritual frames of mind.

Life in the Fast Lane

There are obstacles to enacting contemplative looking and non-doing in a museum. The inclination to speed through interpretation at museums is instinctive. When our daily experiences are filled with images, sounds, and sensations, not to mention a plethora of feelings, moods, and thoughts, it is challenging to put those situations aside in order to tune in to the present—in this case, the messages contained in the art, and the museum experience itself. We all have

internal critics to distract us with mindless chatter; the American Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön describes this habit of mind as *shenpa*. *Shenpa* is a Tibetan Buddhist term for the inner critic that makes one believe that a feeling or thought is like an itch that must be scratched, or like a record that keeps playing over and over in the mind. This pattern of thinking is a hard habit to change and may distract a museumgoer from paying thorough attention to the art they are viewing. In other words, the process of perception may be shortened to alleviate the viewer from the critical voices that are arising as a result of viewing art or the museum experience more generally. Mindfulness tools offer possible solutions to helping museumgoers lengthen the viewing process and stick with what may cause discomfort. As Chödrön explains, “If we can see *shenpa* just as we’re starting to close down, when we feel the tightening, there’s the possibility of catching the urge to do the habitual thing, and not doing it.”

FIG. 3

An installation by Dawn DeDeaux featuring a postcard of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*.



It is not surprising that our minds contain much that distracts us from viewing art. Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master Thích Nhất Hạnh writes about understanding our minds: “Generally, we do not go about our lives in a mindful way. We do not eat mindfully. We do not walk mindfully. We do not look at or speak to people mindfully. We live in forgetfulness.” Mindlessly experiencing anything, including art, may be harmful to our sense of well-being. Kabat-Zinn expresses this mindlessness as disconnected from our lives: “We are out of touch with our feelings and perceptions, with our impulses and our emotions, with our thoughts, with what we are saying, and even with our bodies. This is mostly due to being perpetually preoccupied, lost in our minds, absorbed in our thoughts, obsessed with the past or future, consumed with our plans and our desires, diverted by our need to be entertained, driven by our expectations, fears, or cravings of the moment, however unconscious and habitual all this may be.”

Nhat Hanh offers a way out of the habit of mindlessness: “Always there is the opportunity to live our life fully. When we drink water, we can be aware that we are drinking water. When we walk, we can be aware that we are walking.” According to this thinking, when we view art, we can be aware that we are viewing art. We can use the act of contemplative looking to practice mindfulness and calm the mind. This self-care skill can also be applied to other areas of our lives, bringing about a sense of wellness. First and foremost, in museums, however, we can use the practice of mindfulness to better understand the art, deepen the connection to ourselves, and build awareness of our own cognition and experience with the object.

There are external factors that distract the human mind in addition to its own insistent humming and thus can affect a contemplative experience with art; a current trend involves smartphone camera usage in the galleries (fig. 4). There are many reasons one might

take photos of artworks before the actual looking and perceiving takes place: it could be to document the experience and to share it with someone else who is not in attendance, to embellish an online persona on social media, or to learn more about the art later on. Indeed, there is growing evidence to demonstrate how the smartphone camera has become a detriment to the process of capturing and later recalling our memories. Recent cognitive science studies focus on “how the rapidly changing landscape of technology is negatively affecting how we

In museums, we can use the practice of mindfulness to better understand the art, deepen the connection to ourselves, and build awareness of our own cognition and experience with the object.

remember our own lives, the places we have been, and those with whom we have interacted.” Preliminary research indicates that cell phone users were less likely to commit their experiences to memory; rather, they rely on the technology “to encode and store that information in long-term memory.” Technology has conditioned museumgoers to speed up their experiences like they do on the Internet: they can capture the information with their phones and deal with it later when they may have more time to process it. But does that later time ever come? Contemplative looking can help visitors have authentic experiences at that moment in time, staying present with viewing art in the specific museum context. Ultimately, it could benefit visitors to regain trust in the capacity of the human mind to recall and form memories

without reliance on an artificial source.

Another hindrance to contemplative looking concerns the logistics of museum visits. Museumgoers have certain expectations for the outcome of their visit and may have limited time to attend to their museum experience. They may make only an annual visit—or pilgrimage—to see a certain exhibition or museum in order to check it off their bucket lists. If they are tourists, there are many other opportunities competing for their time and money. Traveling in a group or with family can create its own distractions. Museum admission may be prohibitive, so that visitors can't afford to make multiple visits or spend time with only a few objects, but instead want to see it all to get the most “bang for their buck.” Contemplative looking, therefore, may currently be limited

to a privileged group of museum participants: those who have the time and means to afford decelerated, mindful engagements with art. At MASS MoCA, however, we have been including mindfulness-based insight exercises in our free school programming, and hope to expand free offerings to adults in the near future, including working with our development department to use the contemplative, slow looking movement as a strategy for promoting memberships.

Conclusion

Although there are internal and external challenges to an unhurried, contemplative approach, slow looking and mindfulness has become popular in museums, and not only at MASS MoCA. Other examples include the Quiet Mornings program at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Silent Tours at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; and the Mindful Awareness Meditation program at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, to name a few. Perhaps this trend is in reaction to the quickening pace of life, as museums are recognizing their capacity to offer their audiences refuge and reflection. Or maybe museums are keyed in to the slow movements happening in other arenas, such as slow food, slow writing, and slow fashion.

Contemplative looking can be seen as a radical practice in that it is an effective tool that offers viewers meaningful, individualized experiences. It does not preclude traditional interpretation but adds another dimension. It allows for the art to present its message to us without having to labor for it, functioning as a first step in readying the mind for the interpretation process. It also serves as a skill to improve cognition and mental well-being, and it can offer opportunities to have life-changing experiences within a museum context. Ultimately, contemplative looking activities can strengthen visitors' abilities to discern what is of interest to them and build confidence in their own judgements and thinking.



FIG. 4

Emily Ross, MASS MoCA employee, taking a selfie in *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective*, MASS MoCA, 2018

Update

The writing of this chapter was completed a year before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. While I still believe in the basic tenants articulated in this essay, I would be remiss if I did not give consideration to how slow, contemplative looking could be viewed as a vital social proposition today. Many museums are just reopening (as of this writing, MASS MoCA has been reopened for three weeks) and are required to scale back on how many visitors might be in our buildings at one time. This new strategy necessitates a shift in museums' definition of success away from high attendance toward something more qualitative—which could be cause for celebration by our visitors. Instead of rushing through a crowded gallery, they have more space to have deeper engagement with individual artworks in a more relaxing atmosphere.

Also at this moment of collective trauma during this pandemic, museums have the opportunity to refocus energies on helping to heal our communities with the arts. As I expressed earlier, slowing down to engage with art is a practice that could be applied in many other parts of our lives. We might handle stress better through our contemplative art viewing practice, as it encourages us to be more mindful and more in tune with our thinking and feelings. Because the pandemic required us to socially isolate, many visitors are coming to the museum for a sense of relief and in search of a safe space for reentry into the community at large. Visitors have been saying this is their first outing since the closings, and they are looking for time together instead of apart. One visitor mentioned that “this is the first place I’ve been to since the closings that doesn’t feel sad.” Museums can inspire hope during this very troubling time, and contemplative looking can be an invitation to put stressors aside and spend focused, meaningful time with family and friends. ■

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**LEARNING
A NEW
LANDSCAPE
MAPPING
AS RADICAL
PRACTICE IN
THE MUSEUM**

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Former Curatorial Fellow, Harvard Art Museums

As a group of my colleagues and I entered the Clark Art Institute's galleries and gathered together in front of the painting we would be exploring, I asked them to consider what they had noticed during their brief walk from the museum's entrance to its central gallery of nineteenth-century French works, and to bring those observations to bear on the discussion that would follow. It might seem odd, as part of a colloquium about "radical practice," for my gallery activity to encompass no more than what our daily work looks like as museum educators: walking through a museum, and then talking about a painting. In fact, the "radical" part of my practice was simply to ask my colleagues to think, actively and specifically, about race and identity—their own identities, the identities they had seen reflected around them in the museum they walked through, and the way the painting we were turning our attention to deals with issues of race and identity.

The idea that this work might be radical is disheartening, but unfortunately it is too easy as a museum educator—74 percent of

whom working in American museums are white—to shy away from teaching, talking about, or even thinking about race, identity, and representation in the museum. In my work teaching interns at the Harvard Art Museums, I make it my goal to engage them in a yearlong process of interrogating issues of race and representation in the museum space and developing a commitment to address those issues head-on in each museum educator's practice going forward. To do this, I begin with an extended version of the gallery walk I demonstrated at the Clark: I direct my students to take a map of the museum and mark it up as they explore, annotating spaces where their own identities are or are not reflected in the artworks around them.

I begin with this simple mapping exercise because it is the first step in learning to see the museum differently, to bring to our daily work a new awareness of race and identity. We begin by understanding our own identities in the context of the museum, and carry that over into looking for and questioning how others' identities, particularly those of our

students of color, are or are not reflected in the space and how that might impact their comfort and learning. As longtime Philadelphia-based educator and author Matthew R. Kay puts it, “we can never be too aware of the things we carry, and we can never be too curious about our students’ cargo” when it comes to talking and teaching about race. A critical part of training educators to teach about issues of race and representation in the gallery is training educators to comprehend their museums, and the works therein, in the same way each of their students will see and experience them. We should ask ourselves, and then our students: “How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether?”

Whether or not we are comfortable with the idea, our students *are* looking for and noticing themselves in the museum. When they cannot find themselves—or when they find themselves represented in reductive, racist, or otherizing ways—they may internalize messages about their own cultural value and importance. As educators responsible for our students’ learning and well-being, we need to understand what messages our museum is sending students about race. Mapping begins and facilitates this lifelong process.

The concept of mapping in the museum education context is a useful one: it combines a commonly used evaluation tool focused on self-understanding (“journey maps” have been used in formal studies, including a longitudinal evaluation of the impact of teen programs at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York) with a practical approach to the reality of the museum as a physical structure, a place we enter and must then navigate. Alyssa Machida’s workbook on critical self-evaluation for museum educators, *The Dreamspace Project: A Workbook and Toolkit for Critical Praxis in the American Art Museum*, defines mapping as “developing

When we begin to look carefully at the institutions around us and how we fit into them—in this case, the specific landscape of our museums—we come to both a new understanding of those landscapes and of ourselves.

critical self-awareness, building knowledge of the many ecologies we inhabit, and expanding understandings of our roles and responsibilities.” In the work I do with educators, I focus this broader understanding into the specific act of uncovering the hidden landscapes of a museum (and our place within those landscapes) so that we can better navigate them in our future teaching. When we begin to look carefully at the institutions around us and how we fit into them—in this case, the specific landscape of our museums—we come to both a new understanding of those landscapes and of ourselves.

Mapping Ourselves onto the Museum

The mapping exercise I engage in with educators at the Harvard Art Museums is just one example of this concept; many other iterations exist, from the self-interrogating prompts in Machida’s *Dreamspace Project* to the formalized process of “journey mapping” used by advertising agencies. The exercise I use is inspired by a conference presentation about Mapping Q, a series of art workshops for LGBTQ+ teens that educator Chelsea Farrar organized with a group of teens at the University of Arizona Museum of Art in Tucson. Participating LGBTQ+ teens were asked to “‘map indicators of sex, gender and sexual orientation’ on a map of the UAMA’s galleries.” Teens looked for and labeled spaces

in the museum that reflected, or that could be made to reflect, questions of identity that concerned them. I do a similar exercise with my educators, handing out physical copies of the free gallery map available for visitors and asking them to create a key that they will use to mark up the map as they explore: one symbol for spaces where they feel their identity is reflected in the artwork, one symbol for spaces where they feel comfortable and knowledgeable as educators, one symbol for spaces where they feel uncomfortable or intimidated, and one symbol for spaces where they have taught before (fig. 1).

I try to do this activity early in my work with new educators, because simply completing it requires them to walk slowly and thoughtfully around the physical space of the Harvard Art Museums, familiarizing themselves with the works on view and the layout of the galleries. However, this is also a useful exercise to return to with experienced educators or docents. Often, we become so comfortable in a space that we stop really looking at it carefully—this exercise asks that we take the time to look and look again, to consider thoughtfully how and where we fit in. In the process, we also interrogate ourselves—we must think carefully about how we categorize and define our own identities in order to discover where and how we fit in to the museums. It is impossible to engage in teaching about race and representation without an understanding of one's own racial or ethnic identity (and other categories of identity). This activity asks educators—who, if they are white, may never have been asked before—to recognize their own identities as salient and to think carefully about how they self-define and why.

Mapping oneself onto the museum—which necessitates careful consideration of which races, ethnicities, and other identities are represented in the museum, and how—creates a framework that educators can return to when they begin to consider what their

students of color may see or how they may internalize race and their own place in the museum. Many educators who have felt a general sense of comfort in museum spaces due to their training and career path may newly understand a sense of discomfort when they consider how and where they are represented as a woman, or as a religious or ethnic minority. Conversely, educators who are white or male may begin to acknowledge just how far the museum space goes in reflecting them and how that may contribute to an inherent sense of comfort. Both of these outcomes of self-interrogation help educators begin to conceive of the ways students of color may experience the museum space.

Mapping also helps educators begin to interrogate their educational practices and to understand how their identities and the makeup of their museum's collections interact with their teaching habits. Asking educators to consider and mark where in the museum they usually teach, where they feel comfortable teaching, and where they feel uncomfortable or avoid teaching challenges them to notice where those categories overlap or interact with their self-identity mapping. Do educators feel comfortable teaching with or about artworks that do not reflect their personal identities? Does that comfort level change if they have an academic or professional background teaching with that type of art? These are important trends to recognize. I challenge my educators to notice how often they are including non-Western art in their gallery lessons and to push themselves to further develop that part of their practice.

Mapping can and should eventually become a habit of mind for educators, a process they instinctively engage in when visiting any museum space. At the Clark, I asked fellow colloquium participants to bring this mindset to a very brief walk through the gallery—quickly mapping for themselves who is reflected in the artworks and which messages (implicit or explicit, including in

things like wall plaques and the architecture) the institution is tacitly sending its visitors. The end goal of this early mapping activity is to create what Machida calls “critical self-awareness” in museums: an inherent understanding that just as our experience of these spaces is dependent upon and mediated by our identities, so are our students experiencing these same spaces in powerful ways that are unique to *their* identities and possibly unfamiliar to us.

Close Looking as Collaborative Small-Scale Mapping

Mapping habits are useful not just as practice of awareness-building, but also as part of our active practice as educators, as additions to our toolkit of activities and gallery lessons. It can be helpful to analogize mapping as similar to the process of taking a visual inventory of a painting or sculpture, moving through the piece and noting what is there and how different visual elements interact. The second part of Machida’s definition of mapping, “building knowledge of the many ecologies we inhabit,” refers to the larger-scale ecologies of global networks and neighborhoods, but I find it useful as well to think on a much smaller scale, considering each artwork in the museum as its own unique ecology. Just as we map ourselves and our museum spaces, so too can we map actual artworks, bringing the same critical interrogation to their “ecologies” that we do to the larger institutions that house them.

In particular, once the larger exploration of our museum spaces has helped us identify “dilemmas of representation” within the museum—works in which representations of people of color are either negative or entirely lacking—we can do a smaller-scale mapping of those particular works, one that helps us break them down and address them directly with our students. Larger-scale mapping, including the hands-on activity I do with my educators, not only allows us to identify instances in need of more detailed

analysis, it also primes us to do that work by establishing a general awareness of issues of representation that we can then bring to the study of an individual artwork. Mapping the whole museum enables us to see individual artworks differently.

At the What We May Be colloquium I chose to demonstrate this concept with Jean-Léon Gérôme’s *Slave Market* (1866, fig. 2). This painting presents multiple dilemmas of representation, which colloquium participants began to tease out through conversation, noticing and naming them. As participants



FIG. 2

Jean-Léon Gérôme (French, 1824–1904), *Slave Market*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 33 5/16 x 24 15/16 in. (84.6 x 63.3 cm). Clark Art Institute, Acquired by the Clark, 1930, 1955.53

shared observations with one another, contributing background information about the painting, and voicing observations about small visual details, we collaboratively built a group knowledge of the “ecology” of the painting—the patterns and interactions of the work’s discrete parts. Whereas the early mapping I do with my educators is necessarily a solo activity (as are Machida’s mapping activities) because of its focus on personal identity and experience, this conversational mapping happens together—the group comes together to contribute varied knowledge in order to create a broader understanding than what might be possible for any one individual.

We discussed, among other things, the eroticization of slavery in Gérôme’s painting,

the objectification of the female body, and the potential colorism inherent in the fact that the men surrounding her and engaging in the act of buying or selling her are darker-skinned and coded as more “foreign” to a Western audience. We talked about the French artist’s approach to painting his version of the Near East, depicting it as a place where women were casually used as chattel and dogs lay dead in the street. Together, we built an understanding of the work’s dilemmas of representation—a shared map that allowed us to better understand both the work and where we might stand, as educators, in relation to it. Though we did not have time for this during the short gallery activity at the colloquium, the next step in this process would be to collaboratively brainstorm activities for our students that

FIG. 3

Jean-Léon Gérôme
(French, 1824–
1904), *Snake
Charmer*, 1874. Oil
on canvas, 32 3/8 x
47 5/8 in. (82.2 x
121 cm). Clark Art
Institute, Acquired
by the Clark, 1942,
1955.51



would help them explore this painting's complicated ecology of race, gender, history, and nationality—in other words, forge a path for students to walk using the map we created together.

This painting is also, of course, beautiful, and represents an important example of a specific moment in the history of art. It sits in a gallery at the Clark full of other Orientalist paintings, which depict the Near East in complicated and sometimes problematic ways—two more by Gérôme, *Snake Charmer* (1874) and *Fellah Women Drawing Water* (c. 1873–75), for example, present imaginary and semi-sexualized versions of the region (figs. 3 and 4). Conversations about *Slave Market* that focus on the work's place in the history of art, or on Gérôme's painterly

technique in creating it, are valid ways to examine or teach about the painting, but they are incomplete, particularly once we consider our larger awareness of the space and context of the work. Mapping, as I teach it and as Machida envisions it, asks us to move beyond the conversations we are accustomed to having in front of a work and toward the harder conversations, to shift our observation of this or any artwork from appreciation to critical awareness and action.

Working together to map the dilemmas of paintings like this one, rather than just discussing them, does three things in terms of our practice: it creates a culture in which talking about race and representation is valued, normalizing these topics as a basic part of the way we approach thinking and

FIG. 4

Jean-Léon Gérôme
(French, 1824–
1904), *Fellah
Women Drawing
Water* (c. 1873–75).
Oil on canvas, 26
1/2 x 39 7/16 in.
(67.3 x 100.2
cm). Acquired by
the Clark, 1942,
1955.52



This work of constantly learning—and this state of acknowledging our own curiosity—is necessary and valuable not just when a new exhibition goes on view or a work of art is rotated into the gallery but rather all the time. As we strive to make the museum a more just and equitable space, we must relearn our own assumptions about race and representation in art and in the world.

learning about works of art; it enables colleagues to try out ideas on one another, removing the burden of analyzing a dilemma of representation alone; and it continues the work that the first solo mapping activity began, shifting the way we see our museums and collections to make us more aware of the dilemmas that exist around us and that will be recognized by our visitors and students of color.

Mapping the Way Ahead

The underlying goal of large- and small-scale, solo and collective mapping work is to shift the way we see our museums, so that it becomes easier to identify dilemmas of representation in our collections and teach with and about them. As the psychologist and racism scholar Beverly Daniel Tatum has put it, “racism, like other forms of oppression, is

not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudice, but a *system* involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices. . . . [This] system of advantage is perpetuated when we do not acknowledge its existence.” Museums are institutions drenched in cultural assumptions, shouting their cultural messages as loudly as possible—“this culture is valuable,” “this artwork is worthy”—so much so that they can “frame our most basic assumptions . . . about ourselves.” Mapping is the process of learning to see this web of assumptions and messages more clearly—to make it visible, so that it overlays the work that we do and so that we can no longer ignore it. Once we see this web of messages easily and consistently, we cannot help but expand our “understandings of our roles and responsibilities.” We can and must work within and around the museum’s landscape of cultural messages in order to help our students see it, too. And, in seeing it, we must help them understand it as a system and not as a universal truth, and to allow them to push back against it wherever possible.

It is critical for educators who are wary about this kind of teaching to understand that they aren’t being asked to *fix* issues of representation in their museums—at least not in the concrete sense of problems that go beyond the scope of their work, like the makeup of a collection or the narrative of a label text—much less justify them. Rather, we ask our educators to learn to talk openly about the simple fact that these issues exist. That conversation in and of itself is the first step in “fixing” these issues—only by bringing to light the problem and by making it safe to talk about and push back against can we begin to find solutions.

Making mapping a fundamental part of our practice is necessary work for museum educators. It should become a habit as ingrained as asking, “What do you see that makes you say that?” We are used to the idea that we need to teach ourselves before

we can teach our students; as museum educators, we are particularly familiar with the process of learning about a new work of art or exhibition before we can adequately plan programs or gallery lessons. The form this learning takes is often direct: we read a publication about the artist or we attend a walkthrough of the new exhibition and hear the curator's perspective. We are comfortable with the knowledge that we are not always, or even often, the experts on what we teach, and so we constantly strive to learn more so that we can become better, more informed, and more accurate educators.

This work of constantly learning—and this state of acknowledging our own curiosity—is necessary and valuable not just when a new exhibition goes on view or a work of art is rotated into the gallery but rather all the time. As we strive to make the museum a more just and equitable space, we must relearn our own assumptions about race and representation in art and in the world. This is difficult, sometimes frightening work. Many educators can attest to the reluctance of peers or docents to rethink the narratives they are familiar with when it comes to works of art that incorporate representations of people of color. But teaching well with and about these works of art requires embracing a constant state of learning and questioning. We cannot teach our students without teaching ourselves. We cannot guide them through a difficult landscape without a map in hand. ■

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- 12 In our work together, Aaliyah El-Amin and I have noted that this type of activity should go further than just helping students explore a work; it should "foster critical literacy about dilemmas of representation" by helping students develop the tools they will need to critically interrogate and, later, push back against the racist narratives inherent in works like Gérôme's *Slave Market*. These include visual literacy, discussion and debate skills, and art-making and creative writing practices, a set of tools that enable students to identify, name, and remake the problems of representation they find in museums.
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LISTENING
THE DRIVER OF
SOLUTIONS AT
THE MONTREAL
MUSEUM OF
FINE ARTS

THOMAS BASTIEN, MARILYN LAJEUNESSE, STEPHEN LEGARI

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The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) has been developing its approach to listening and responding to needs of the community for over twenty years through a wide array of initiatives. Of the MMFA's 1.3 million visitors in 2017, nearly 300,000 took part in educational, recreational, and wellness activities organized by the museum. And of those 300,000 people, many of whom come from the 450 or so organizations with which we cocreate group-specific programs, more than 30,000 took part in free activities aimed at generating a sense of inclusion and belonging.

In order to confirm the relevance of what we do and a museum's role in countless spheres of society, we are participating in more than twenty research projects in collaboration with universities in Quebec, across Canada, and around the world. These studies have helped us realize that the MMFA is no longer what it was in its beginnings. Rather than a cultural institution offering services to a portion of the privileged socioeconomic public, today it is a multifaceted institution that varies according to

each individual who encounters it: the museum serves as a school, a university, a place to enjoy oneself, and a place that fosters health. It is physical as well as digital, and it encourages diversity, adapting in response to its visitors to become a meeting place where each person can find a source of inspiration, discovery, and happiness. The MMFA has evolved from an authoritarian institution to a responsive one, and this shift has changed everything; we now see the museum as serving the community rather than teaching the community.

This change did not occur in the span of a few months. It is rooted in the museum's desire to know the diversity of our community and focus each project on the objectives of a specific group. Attentive listening is our greatest asset.

Bridging Art and the Community Since 1999

Many museums around the world have recognized their potential as agents for social change. Internationally, museums have made their collections and exhibitions more accessible through a variety of methods. In

this spirit of inclusion and in recognition of the importance of direct contact with art and culture for everyone, the MMFA initiated the Bridging Art and the Community program in 1999. This five-year program targeted organizations working with cultural communities, immigrants, seniors, at-risk youth, people from low-income neighborhoods, disadvantaged families, and those with physical and intellectual disabilities. We wanted to invite people who, in the past, had not been able to make museum visits a priority. Working at a grassroots level, education and public programs staff forged ties and created partnerships with community groups that worked with people who were largely marginalized by society. Throughout the program's five years, more than 30,000 people took part in its educational activities. An evaluation of the program in 2001 indicated that group leaders were extremely satisfied with the service, and with our openness and flexibility. Their groups reaped many benefits from the increased use of the museum as a cultural, educational, and social resource. Additionally, Bridging Art and the Community won the Canadian Museums Association Award for Outstanding Achievement for educational programming. Following the focus groups and the positive feedback we received in evaluations, as well as the active attempts by our own foundation to secure additional funding, the program continued under a different name: Sharing the Museum.

Sharing the Museum: 2004–Present

The second phase of our commitment to community education began in October 2004. The Bridging Art and the Community program (1999–2004) provided a solid foundation for a more ambitious project in which opportunities for increasingly meaningful museum activities could be proposed by community groups. Three guiding principles inform Sharing the Museum: openness, attentiveness, and action.

The MMFA has evolved from an authoritarian institution to a responsive one, and this shift has changed everything; we now see the museum as serving the community rather than teaching the community.

The museum's Education and Wellness department welcomes any ideas for activities, educational materials, or events proposed by community organizations. We listen to and consult with group leaders in order to best respond to their specific needs. We then cocreate programs that suit their groups' interests and learning styles. Since the inception of Sharing the Museum more than fifteen years ago, hundreds of community organizations have partnered with the museum to develop activities around our collection that are tailor-made to meet their groups' needs and interests.

Many community organizations in Montreal work with society's most marginalized people whose greatest challenges include lack of income, lack of accessibility for or understanding of physical or intellectual disabilities and mental or physical health issues, homelessness, family crises, and the particular issues faced by newly arriving immigrants and refugees, like enduring xenophobia and struggling to adapt to their new home. In recent literature on museum education, these factors that contribute to exclusion have been seen as interrelated, with one dimension connected to the other: from poor health to low levels of education, low income, and poor housing—all of these factors reinforce social, cultural, and political exclusion. Sharing the Museum is filling the need for cultural and educational activities that, for many years, have been inaccessible

to large parts of the Montreal community. The highly positive response to this program indicates that if these groups did not visit the museum before, it was not because they placed low priority on cultural engagement, but rather due to these programs' perceived inaccessibility. With shoestring budgets and the needs of a growing number of disadvantaged people to serve, many groups have had other priorities until now.

Anecdotal evidence collected from participants and group leaders who have taken part in the museum's programs shows that the benefits of a museum visit are especially pronounced in the affective domain. Respondents have described the following results of looking at and creating art in a museum setting:

- exploring inner experience
- developing self-awareness
- developing a new social network
- promoting spontaneity, ingenuity, and discovery in a nonthreatening environment
- bringing together vulnerable people in a nonthreatening environment
- regaining confidence and a sense of self-worth
- stimulating the imagination
- rediscovering meaning in their lives
- developing social skills and social integration
- gaining a sense of empowerment
- learning to be tolerant of others' opinions
- adapting to a new environment
- reinforcing ties among participants in the group
- enhancing quality of life
- increasing the capacity for self-expression
- learning in a collaborative setting
- increasing access for disabled people within the community
- rediscovering autonomy

These are a few of the benefits cited in proposals for projects, conversations with participants, and written comments from group organizers. They are repeated time and time again.

The Link between Sharing the Museum and Well-Being

For many regular museum visitors, some of these points probably come as no surprise. People who value visiting a museum as a vital activity in their lives know and recognize the benefits of regular contact with art, whether as part of a commitment to lifelong learning, a social occasion with family or friends, or quiet time to reflect on their lives, values, or other subjects that interactions with art may elicit.

The cultural critic and writer Max Wyman has underlined the importance of art and culture in all of our lives: "The creative impulse is part of what makes us who we are. It adds to the sum of shared human experience, insight and knowledge. It also contributes, in a more general way, to social health—through the therapeutic values of art, through art's value as an educational tool, and through art's ability to advance a more compassionate society."

With the many benefits described to us by group leaders and their members—especially groups who serve individuals with mental health issues—we began to reflect on the museum's impact in our community. We asked ourselves: How can we attribute positive outcomes such as major changes in social behavior or increased self-confidence to activities in the museum's galleries or art making in our studios? And if we are indeed having such a positive impact on well-being, should we consider formalizing our links with wellness and cocreating programs with health professionals? This led to the development of partnerships with occupational therapists and doctors, and ultimately, the hiring of our own in-house art therapist who designs programs for our Art Hive. The Art Hive not only welcomes preformed groups for special programs, but is also available two days a week, free of charge, to anyone who wants to experiment with art materials in a friendly, nonjudgmental environment. The Art Hive thus becomes another entry point into

welcoming individuals, who may or may not have been part of a community organization that came to the museum in the past, into the educational activities at the MMFA.

MMFA: Quality of Encounter

There are various kinds, degrees, and qualities of encounters at the MMFA. On any given day, the average visitor arriving at the main entrance of the museum is greeted by staff members who are responsible for directing and informing the public. It is believed that the quality of these exchanges has a major impact on visitor satisfaction. When one enters a cultural institution along with thousands of others and is made to feel personally welcome, the experience can resonate throughout the visit. A positive welcome creates a culture of openness and is a conscious part of our programming.

When we examine the function of encounter in the MMFA's various educational and wellness programs, we use a continuum of proximity. At one end of the continuum there is the didactic. This kind of encounter is informed by a more traditional educational model, and benefits from the richness of imparted knowledge. Whether with a museum mediator (educator) or guide (docent), the visitor is invited into a sphere of exchange where the emphasis is on learning a particular body of information. The classic image of this would be a small group gathered in front of a Henri Matisse painting, a Kent Monkman installation, or a Niki de Saint-Phalle sculpture with the mediator or guide acting as an intermediary, sharing discipline-specific knowledge that the general public may not have. Though this type of encounter is largely rooted in the museum's authority, a dialogic approach is essential to stimulate discussion among the participants in the groups.

Further along the continuum we find a more interactive and personable encounter. The sense of proximity and thus the quality of the relationship with the public in the

museum shifts when the encounter occurs within the framework of a cocreated project. Each year the MMFA collaborates with numerous organizations to create made-to-measure experiences—programs designed based on discussions with group leaders that respond to a group's needs and interests—that draw upon over two decades of community outreach and collaboration. The clientele they serve are varied, and the programs address needs ranging from long-term illness to child development. The impetus of all these projects begins with inviting different organizations to consider how the museum may connect with their mission and then building a relationship with them. This includes not only meetings but also visiting and appreciating each other's professional milieus. As the project takes shape, the museum and the group leaders develop a better understanding of the needs of each population, define facilitators' roles, and shape a strategic plan. Developing a strong relationship between organizations is essential, as we believe it has an impact on participant experience.

Once the project takes shape, the quality of the relationship that develops with the participants is often, but not exclusively, based on the frequency of encounters. A group that comes once a week for several weeks compared to another that comes intermittently throughout the year may experience a different connection to the staff, the institution, and the art itself. With frequency comes familiarity and a sense of the personal. It is not uncommon—and is in fact desirable—for our visitors to develop a feeling that they are at home in the museum.

In these cocreated projects, the exchange between facilitators and the public—whether for wellness, art therapy, or learning—emphasizes connection and the idea of shared ownership of the museum. Those who facilitate these encounters, whether in the gallery or the art studio, seek out and honor

Our society's needs are many and varied, and the MMFA strives to meet them by cocreating and presenting initiatives that foster feelings of approachability, inclusion, and belonging in each person.

the experience of their participants. Over time, they may get to know aspects of their participants' lives and develop a relationship based less on formality and more on shared experience.

Finally, at the other end of the continuum, we find a quality of encounter rooted in feelings of comfort and safety: at times, an artwork will trigger an unexpected response, requiring courage on the part of the individual who shares their response and inviting others to be similarly open about their reactions to works in the galleries. These exchanges are unscripted, often arise organically within the sphere of a project, and typically involve only a few people. When participants can reveal some aspect of themselves, relate personally to a work of art, or wish to be known in some measure, a special opportunity arises in which museum staff can support someone in need.

Naked Tour for the Exhibition *Focus: Perfection – Robert Mapplethorpe*

In November 2016, when the MMFA was presenting the exhibition *Focus: Perfection – Robert Mapplethorpe*, nearly one hundred people, mostly men, enjoyed a unique experience: strolling naked through the galleries, accompanied by volunteer guides.

Many questioned the aim and impact of such an event. Why organize a museum visit like this? How did the public feel about it?

Finding the answer raises many concerns regarding museums whose collections have their roots in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

- Who do the works of art in a museum belong to?
- Who is authorized to allow or refuse an experience desired by a group of people?
- Does the mission developed by a museum meet the expectations of its nearby communities?

When LGBTQ2+ contacted us with the idea to co-organize this unusual experience, we wondered if the MMFA would be the best host. The request provoked much reflection from several departments, including members of our education, communications, curatorial, and security teams. The question that frequently arose was: Would it be perceived as a publicity stunt? Or was it really responding to a specific audience's interests and enjoyment of an exhibition that especially appealed to a segment of the population that, even today, often feels marginalized? How might Robert Mapplethorpe have felt about it?

After pondering the request and considering these points, we decided to proceed with the tour. This was not, after all, the first time naked museum tours had been organized: the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in Sydney and the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra notably hosted naked museum tours in 2015–16. In addition, Mapplethorpe's own sexuality and his emphasis on photographing diverse body types led us to believe that the experience, created in cooperation with LGBTQ2+ was especially suited to this exhibition. After initially thinking that it would be a night out for "perverts," one participant commented,

“I thought about it and realized what a great idea it is, given Mapplethorpe’s art.” Another participant commented, “After removing my underwear, I realized that all men are equal, that we are all the same. . . . We’re very focused on image, but in fact we are all beautiful and others will find us beautiful when we ourselves feel beautiful.”

Though it was difficult to recruit docents to give the tour (they remained clothed), five docents did agree to be a part of the experience. One docent remarked how the evening was well organized: “Cocktails were served beforehand, helping to relax the atmosphere. Many participants knew each other beforehand, and they were calm, engaged, and concentrated.” For several participants, the decision to join the visit was not an easy one, and they thought long and hard before taking the step. For others, their participation was a “political act where their sexual orientation was, for once, not confined to the margins of society.”

Finally, the docents, for the most part, were happy to have done the tour, commenting on how respectful and at ease the participants were. One docent commented, “The warm human contact within what might be considered such a subversive act was palpable. It was emotional and far from banal.” Though happy to have had the experience, many emphasized that under other circumstances they might consider such a tour to be gratuitous. One stated that the museum’s mission of inclusion and diversity does not necessarily encompass nudity, and that most of the visitors in her group were regular museum visitors.

The Naked Tour wasn’t a marketing ploy, nor did it embody a group of people appropriating the discourse of a renowned artist who celebrated the diversity of bodies throughout his life. Above all it was a unique opportunity for the museum to offer a powerful experience to members of

our community. Though the request, at the time, felt rather unrealistic and perhaps even superficial, it did instigate much discussion both within the museum and with the leaders of the group requesting the visit. This type of dialogue and mutual respect is essential for any change to happen in institutions with colonial histories and traditional modes of museum practice.

Our society’s needs are many and varied, and the MMFA strives to meet them by cocreating and presenting initiatives that foster feelings of approachability, inclusion, and belonging in each person. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts sees this as our essential mission, particularly as a nonprofit art museum where the majority of works in our collection have been donated. ■

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**OUT OF
OUR HEADS
ACCENTUATE
THE PHYSICAL**

APRIL OSWALD

Museum Education Director, Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute

Introduction

Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute (MWP) Museum of Art, like art museums across the country, for decades has endeavored to present interpretive programs that appeal to the broad spectrum of ways people learn. Howard Gardner’s pioneering 1983 work *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* was significant in inspiring this undertaking. In addition to guided tours and gallery talks, we at MWP have developed programs that reach beyond the visual and the verbal, including “please touch” panels, food workshops, and music and dance performances. Over the years, we have offered tai chi and meditation workshops, developed touch tours and scent stations, and began regular art and yoga classes. These activities opened up opportunities for making connections with objects through both traditional avenues of communication, such as museum labels and gallery guides, and through sound, touch, and movement. These less conventional activities are fun, entertaining, and novel, and they also broaden

dimensions for communication. However, no matter how unorthodox our approach may seem, the art object remains central to the interpretation.

What art museums once considered “radical”—like exhibitions of motorcycles, guitars, and clothes—has gradually become mainstream. This is also true of methods of interpretation and visitor engagement. As approaches to exhibitions and interpretation change, museum staff continue to consider whether visitors are genuinely interested in what their institutions offer. How do museums identify exactly what visitors value in their experience, and how does that correspond with the mission of the institution? What is now considered radical may be that which has always been most essential and unique to museums: the authentic object or creation.

This essay considers how nontraditional ways of engaging museum objects can tap into profoundly traditional human experiences that result from encountering objects in

FIG. 1

MWPAI Museum of Art curator of modern and contemporary art Mary Murray leads Art and Yoga participants in a discussion and poetry reading in the exhibition *Kimono! The Artistry of Itchiku Kubota*.



ceremonial or otherwise distinctive contexts. In addition, it considers the curiosity and joy visitors express in contemplating museum artifacts and how museums can embody their fundamental role of cultivating that encounter, achieving an experience that is both authentic and appropriately full of wonder.

Art and Yoga

MWPAI Art and Yoga began in 2006, when few museums were offering this type of program. Over the years, Art and Yoga has adhered to the format developed from the beginning: each session begins with a curator presenting a short talk or poem focused on an exhibition or single artwork, followed by a brief discussion with the group and a yoga session led by a certified instructor.

The sessions are held on Saturday mornings, beginning shortly after the museum opens. Gallery locations for the yoga portion of the session are selected based on available space and exhibition or installation constraints.

When I dropped in one Saturday morning, the session began with a poem selected by the curator for its resonance with a particular artwork. The group gathered in a gallery featuring the exhibition of contemporary artist Itchiku Kubota (fig. 1). Kubota uses oversize kimonos as the expansive canvas on which he fashions brilliant, ethereal landscapes and elaborately conceived mythical creatures. Like the kimono, the poem the curator chose, “Intimate Detail” (2005) by Heid E. Erdrich, has passages of calm and passages of almost frantic animation. Participants of the yoga session took turns reading sections of the poem aloud. There were about twenty participants—an average size group for the program. Mostly regulars, many participants were comfortable reading and, with little prompting from the curator, discussing the poem and its connections with the art. Following the discussion, the yoga session began with the participants settling comfortably on our backs, taking slow, deep, calming breaths to begin to focus on our

bodies. I began with my eyes closed, then decided to open them to gaze instead on a nearby print, *Mt. Fuji at Sunset* from 1934 by Tsuchiya Koitsu. Gradually, we made our way to our feet to warrior pose. Gazing at the gallery wall directly in front of us, we took in Kubota's tour-de-force kimono of Mount Fuji. Though my job as a museum educator requires me to spend time with the exhibitions and the objects, looking at the work in this contemplative way afforded an entirely different perspective.

Many museums now offer programs in yoga or other movement, like dance or tai chi, and in various types of meditation and mindfulness. Formats vary widely, from weekly to monthly, from hour-long sessions to full-day retreats, and may be held outdoors, in an auditorium, or in a vast indoor courtyard surrounded by artworks, as with the Brooklyn Museum yoga program, with attendance usually hovering around two hundred (fig. 2).

Reactions to yoga sessions happening in our museum range from the positive feedback of longtime participants who are inspired by their newfound connections with the exhibitions, to those who view it as a gimmick, a distraction, or even an obstacle for visitors who may be restricted from viewing galleries where yoga is in session. Museum staff also hold diverse views; for some, it represents a unique interpretive experience, while others see it as a frivolous activity that may even pose a risk to the artwork.

Frivolous or Relevant: Why Do Yoga in the Museum?

In 2006, at the start of the Art and Yoga program, MWPAl's mission statement included the directives "to serve diverse audiences" and "to promote participation in the arts." Our current mission is "to create transformational arts experiences that cultivate curiosity and creativity, enlighten, educate, and inspire." It's no surprise that

FIG. 2

Art & Yoga in the Beaux-Arts Court of the Brooklyn Museum, August 10, 2019. Photo: Kolin Mendez Photography, courtesy Brooklyn Museum



what has remained constant over the years is that all programs are interpretive and facilitate visitor experiences with art. Art and Yoga was conceived as such a program. Sessions are held in the galleries where exhibitions are installed (fig. 3), and each session begins with close looking and discussion about a work of art. Participants cite the environment as the reason they choose to do yoga classes at MWPAL.

The Rubin Museum of Art in New York has a similar interpretive goal, with a very different mission, describing itself as “a dynamic environment that stimulates learning, promotes understanding, and inspires personal connections to the ideas, cultures, and art of Himalayan regions.” The Rubin is therefore uniquely situated to make connections with traditions such as yoga and meditation by offering sessions that root those practices in the cultural contexts of the Himalayas. Their yoga program includes sessions held in their galleries, and their

meditation sessions, held in the auditorium, are guided by a projected image of a single object from their collection.

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London began its yoga program in 2016 in conjunction with a special theme that season on engineering; yoga sessions were held in the garden near a temporary sculpture installation that was responsive to visitors’ movements. The program was an instant hit, and continued for two years beyond the engineering-themed programs with yoga sessions conceived with thematic links to the collection. Depending on the weather, sessions were held outdoors in the museum garden or indoors in one of the gallery spaces.

Yoga programs at each of these museums incorporate close-looking sessions, further fulfilling an essential component of their missions by encouraging visitor connections to exhibited works of art. At the Victoria and Albert Museum, all yoga sessions were

FIG. 3

Art and Yoga participants in the MWPAL Museum of Art gallery near *Olkienniki No. 1* (1972), by Frank Stella (American, b. 1936).



followed by a gallery tour highlighting objects in the collection linked to that session's theme. The Brooklyn Museum website lists the option for participants to "explore our galleries on a self-guided tour of specially selected contemplative objects" after their yoga session. The New Orleans Museum of Art offers weekly yoga sessions in their sculpture park and tai chi sessions in their galleries. For most museums, the building, grounds, and proximity of the collection are considered the inspiration for yoga and other wellness activities.

Whether or not the collection includes objects specifically intended for devotional use, as in the case of the Rubin Museum of Art, museum spaces in which practitioners can be surrounded by works of art rich with potential for contemplation offer a suitable environment for yoga—for some participants, these spaces feel more suitable to yoga than a gym or a studio. Whether it is a Tibetan prayer wheel or a painting by Jackson Pollock, sharing gallery space with an object or artwork for an extended period of time presents the opportunity to consider it at length, to truly meditate on it from a new perspective. This was my experience at the start of my yoga session, lying still, as I considered Koitsu's print of Mount Fuji for much longer than I would have on a typical gallery visit. My meditative encounter yielded the benefits of extended looking: noting how the artist captured the colors of dusk, from salmon to indigo, and the twinkling lights amid the trees on the distant lake shore—details I had not noticed before.

The Physical Component: The Space, the Body, and the Object

Anyone who has taken a yoga class at a studio, gym, or other similar facility knows that the instructor will usually construct an environment conducive to relaxation and meditation. This might include candles, incense, dimmed lighting, and perhaps plants and pictures. While the museum yoga

session typically does not include candles or incense, the setting may have a quality or an association that is considered favorable for quiet reflection, with perhaps only the addition of a small gong to signal the start and end of the session.

Setting can be a powerful influence on mood and behavior. In the chapter "The Physical Context" in *Learning from Museums*, authors John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking examine the phenomenon of people's expectations of various social settings and how that affects behavior: "How an individual behaves in these physical spaces, what they observe, and what they remember are also strongly influenced by the physical context; much of this impact occurs subtly and/or subconsciously." Museum staff, especially educators and docents, are well acquainted with the phenomenon of "the hush"—the deferential behavior of the museum visitor suitable for a library or temple. As a visitor interviewed at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in Connecticut explains, "Museums are, sort of, temples; for me they're sort of like a holy place of humanity. It's sort of raw; I think it displays the best of our nature." Art critic Jason Farago observes this kind of reverence applied to attitudes about art: "We frequently use religious language when talking about art. We make 'pilgrimages' to museums or to landmarks of public art in far-off locales. We experience 'transcendence' before major paintings or large-scale installations." Similarly, *New York Times* architecture critic Paul Goldberger has observed that "we have in our culture conflated the aesthetic and the sacred, which is why, I suppose, that the art museum seems to have replaced the cathedral."

Falk and Dierking discuss how attitudes and expectations of a particular environment affect learning: "So powerful are these behavior settings that people learn to associate certain settings with learning—for example, museums and libraries. . . . Given

that museums in particular, and other free-choice learning settings as well, have been consistently found to generate positive feelings and high levels of interaction with aspects of the physical setting, we have argued that they must also facilitate learning. Consistent evidence for learning in museums is now being found, much of it showing the strong interrelationships between learning, affect, and setting.”

While the environment is a powerful influence on the individual, physical engagement and participation further enhances this effect. Cathedrals, temples, and shrines are spaces that engage the visitor physically. Statuaries, stained glass, incense, bells, and candles are often incorporated in ceremonies that likely also include movement: walking, kneeling, lighting or holding incense or candles, chanting, striking a bell or a gong, or singing. Moreover, following a familiar prescribed activity in an environment that is conducive to the ceremony can evoke a feeling of well-being and belonging. As is the case with rituals in sacred spaces, museums also enlist the body and the senses to aid in opening up ways for visitors to access, connect with, and experience art. Furthermore, studies on the practice of “somatic” learning, or engaging the body, considered to be a type of “mindfulness,” suggest that incorporating movement such as dance, tai chi, or yoga has a decidedly energizing effect.

Perhaps the elephant in the room is the room itself. Whether the visitor associates the museum setting with a library or a shrine, there is often a sense that the space itself is distinctive. It may be that such an environment facilitates a set of expectations for the visitor, the result of a centuries-long tradition of institutions that are built in service to cultural artifacts. Installation details include location, exhibition furniture, and display elements such as light, text, sounds, smells, and other physical or sensory components. When Saturday morning

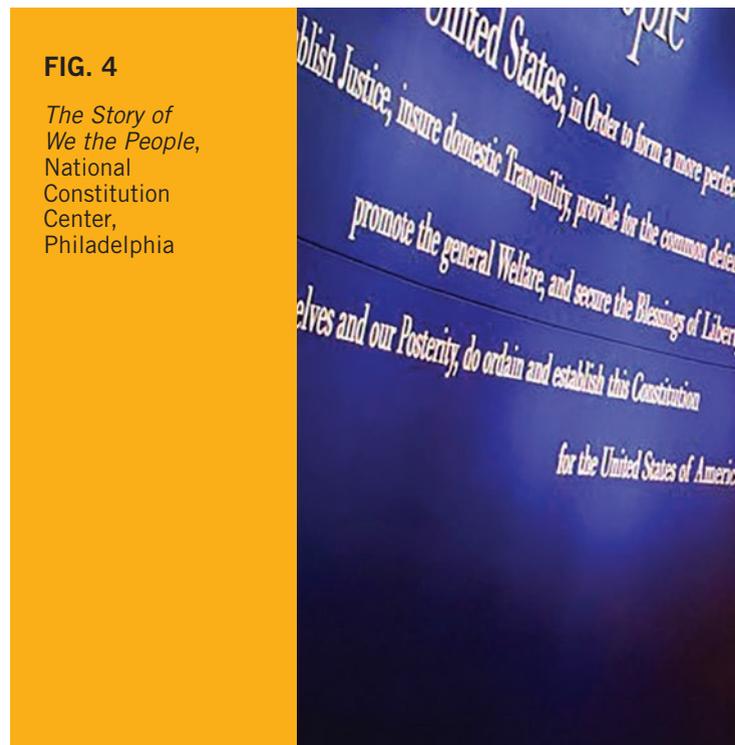
What is now considered radical may be that which has always been most essential and unique to museums: the authentic object or creation.

yoga participants—the majority of whom are regulars—are asked why they prefer the museum to other options for their yoga sessions, they frequently cite the art, the discussion, the curator, and the yoga instructor as reasons for their choice. For them, these components work together to make the ideal environment.

Museums are designed and maintained to optimize the environment and conditions for the preservation of the objects they house, with staff specifically trained to present, interpret, and manage the handling and

FIG. 4

*The Story of
We the People,*
National
Constitution
Center,
Philadelphia



conservation needs of the objects in their care. The museum gallery showcases these authentic objects that may or may not be sacred, but are nevertheless singular.

The Authentic Object and the Museum

As with the Art and Yoga program, art objects are the focus of all interpretive programs we develop. As program ideas are introduced and considered, our “true north”—our point of reference as the center of the interpretive exercise—is the art object. But I have often wondered whether the presence or lack of authentic objects is a consideration for the average museum visitor. Does anyone notice or care? This question occurred to me in 2005, on my first trip to Philadelphia with my husband and our son. We visited Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, and then continued our tour of Philadelphia’s historic district with a walk to the National Constitution Center. The main exhibit there consisted of a concentric three-ring multimedia display that features a continuous video projection on a giant screen of visitors

reciting the presidential oath of office, “Living News” theater performance broadcasts, and a series of touch screens highlighting influential Americans in history (fig. 4). As I stood there, feeling somewhat overwhelmed in the packed exhibition hall, it occurred to me that the constitution, the object around which the bustling media and visitor activity was centered, was housed not in this building but in the National Archives Museum more than 130 miles away, in Washington, DC, along with the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. What was it that caused the feeling for me that something was missing? It may have subconsciously registered that none of the usual trappings required for exhibiting authentic objects were at work, like museum cases or special lighting. Other elements, such as the noise level and volume of activity likely signaled a different relationship between the visitors and the exhibitions than I had come to expect in my own museum experiences. In the years since that visit, along with my museum colleagues, I have regularly reflected on the motivations and expectations of



visitors, and preferences for visiting an art museum rather than a science museum, or an aquarium rather than a house museum. What do visitors expect in a museum? What do visitors want?

In a 2014 article about science learning in museums, science centers, zoos, and aquariums, the authors presented a comprehensive review of a study of visitor engagement with authentic objects versus replicas or photographs:

Lindgren-Streicher and Reich (2007) found that both, for a hands-on engineering task and an exhibit interpretation task, visitors of science museums preferred original artifacts over touchable 3D replicas or computer simulations, and used these artifacts more often and for a longer time. Similarly, a study by Bauer, Hampp, Schwan, and Kampschulte (2012) indicated that visitors pay more attention to authentic objects than to photographic reproductions and that the former are also better remembered in a delayed memory task. In a recent experiment, Bauer et al. (2012) demonstrated that authentic objects did also elicit more thought than corresponding replicas.

Typically, direct experience of living animals has been demonstrated to go along with persisting vivid memories, including sights, sounds, and smells (Packer & Ballantyne, 2010). In addition, although visitors of zoos and aquariums have been found to be less interested in cognitive learning-related aspects than do [sic] visitors to a museum, instead emphasizing their social and restorative aspects (Packer & Balantyne, 2004), some knowledge gains have been reported, which persisted over several weeks (Adelman, Falk, & James, 2000). A study by Kisiel, Rowe, Vartabedian, and Kopczak (2012) indicates that

combining experience of live animals with opportunities for physical interaction facilitates family conversation and meaning making in terms of scientific reasoning.

Over the decades, museums of history and art have come to acknowledge the benefits of visitor engagement and have gradually embraced and incorporated the kinds of playful hands-on activities that previously had been reserved for science museums, zoos, and aquariums. Though in-gallery activities are now ubiquitous in art and history museums, these were still a novelty as recently as 2002, when I attended the conference *Interactive Learning in Museums of Art and Design* at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The conference was convened to consider what museums of art and design could learn from museums of science and technology about interactive engagement. Like those institutions, art and history museums continue to learn from and with their visitors, while emphasizing the authentic object as the driver of every experience. Apparently, a majority of visitors likewise value the experience with the authentic object that only a museum can offer.

With this in mind, consider exhibits developed by companies like Imagine Exhibitions, Inc., and Premier Exhibitions. These packaged productions travel the world like “pop-up museums” with titles such as *Imagine Van Gogh*, *The Discovery of King Tut*, and *Da Vinci The Exhibition*, resembling museum exhibitions but absent of any actual works of art, artifacts, or original documents. The exhibits consist of, for example, enlarged reproductions of documents from Leonardo da Vinci’s notebooks, fabricated models of his proposed machines, 3-D replicas of artifacts excavated from the tomb of King Tut, and video projections of enlarged details from the paintings of Vincent van Gogh (fig. 5). These exhibitions do not require the environmental controls, security, or much of



FIG. 5

Imagine Van Gogh, Imagine Exhibitions. Photo: Tandem Expositions

the staff that are necessary to preserve and maintain museum objects, though admission fees tend to be similar to or higher than those of traditional museums. It is entirely possible that these productions, drawing on the museum model for their concepts,

As is the case with rituals in sacred spaces, museums also enlist the body and the senses to aid in opening up ways for visitors to access, connect with, and experience art.

designs, and presentations, are virtually indistinguishable from museum exhibitions to the general public, and that their popularity and success are largely due to the institutions they imitate. Nevertheless, the attraction and benefit of the enlarged images of the paintings is undeniable. The opportunity to see 3-D renderings of Leonardo da Vinci's proposed machines is likewise thrilling and edifying. While museums employ options for careful, close, and extended looking at objects—from the use of magnifying glasses, as in the Met's 2017–18 exhibition *Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman and Designer*, to digital images accessible through zooming in on touch screens on an app or gallery interactive—Imagine Exhibitions' immersive experiences, when paired with the actual objects they illustrate, present still more possibilities for exploration and wonder that are worthy of consideration, especially as techniques to summon the visitor back to the authentic object.

Accentuating the Physical Post-COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 shutdown, the museum transitioned to offering programs online. The museum reopened in July 2020, though on-site events including movies, receptions, gallery talks, and tours remained on hold until March 2021. During those eight months, as the museum transitioned to digital program offerings exclusively, we faced the challenges of determining what makes a successful virtual program, how best to use the digital medium to keep visitors engaged, and how to compensate for the lack of the social component of in-person or community interaction. Among the virtual programs offered, the level of participation in Art and Yoga remained similar to what it was prior to the shutdown. An email survey of the virtual yoga participants revealed that most of the participants enjoyed the virtual program but look forward to returning to the galleries. However, several participants joined the virtual program because they either lived too far away or were not available on Saturday mornings to participate in the program at the museum and hoped the virtual option would be available after the program returned on site. When those participants were asked why they chose the MWPAI yoga program among the many online offerings, they cited their fondness for MWPAI: "I never looked beyond MWPAI. I am a fan of the museum," another virtual Art and Yoga regular stated. "I was initially drawn to the MWPAI yoga and art Saturday AM classes because I wanted to see [curator] Mary Murray and hear her talk. Right away, I loved the ritual of Mary's talk followed by . . . yoga."

In addition to the survey of Art and Yoga participants, a general visitor survey available on our website, on social media, and sent by email to members in June 2020 elicited responses of support and even affection, with many comments like, "We miss you" and "I love Munson Williams." Responses also included gratitude for keeping visitors engaged and for asking for feedback and

advice on going forward, including reopening and plans for programs and activities. During this time of distancing and isolation, the sentiments expressed in the surveys stood out for their heartfelt appreciation that visitor safety and health was the museum's first priority. A few comments urged reopening: "Open Up! Art is meant to be seen," and "Be Brave! Live Boldly!," though supportive, seemed to eschew caution.

The COVID-19 shutdown and isolation produced a distinct chilling effect and disconnectedness that has reverberated around the globe. The internet has offered considerable solace and a way to remain connected to friends, family, co-workers, and other networks. As museums closed their doors, they expanded their use of the internet to make their collections and programs available in the only way possible, i.e., virtually, to extend and shore up connections with members and visitors—whether new or longstanding—who have chosen to participate in virtual programs and events. The outcome of MWPAI's efforts to continue to engage with visitors to promote learning and social interaction and to expand dialogue stands out for what we heard and learned from visitors and members. However, while many respondents expressed support and appreciation for the virtual programs, they made it clear in their additional comments that they eagerly awaited returning to the museum in person, with feedback like, "I miss MWPAI please reopen as soon as possible—I'm going through art withdrawal!," "Nothing replaces experiencing art up close," and "Art is something that can only truly be appreciated live." Moreover, when asked "What virtual activities would you participate in after we reopen?," 25 percent of the respondents answered that they are not interested in virtual programs. This is an important reminder that, in addition to those who aren't inclined to participate in virtual programs, there is a segment of the population that is off the grid, digitally

speaking. They aren't on Facebook or any other social media, and, considering that a little over a fifth of the museum's members do not have email, they likely do not own a computer. They are, therefore, not among the survey respondents—their interests and voices are not represented, though they are likely the visitors and members who are most deprived by the absence of a physical connection, and in greatest need to be physically present in the gallery, with the objects. It is important to develop ways to engage these non-digital visitors, as their personal engagement with museum objects perfectly aligns with the joy and wonder of the authentic museum experience that I describe in this essay.

Conclusion

Engaging the senses, activating the body, and offering a stress-free setting where the visitor's options for movement through the space are clear are all elements of custom, ceremony, and ritual. Traditional observances tend to incorporate sensory engagement and, whether celebratory or sorrowful, are often enhanced through music, flowers, incense, candles, regalia, and food and drink. Though some of those elements are not permitted in gallery spaces because of restrictions intended to preserve works of art, the transformative quality that is associated with places in which these types of ceremonies and learning rituals occur has been ascribed to museums. The nature of the experience that visitors expect is bound to the particularities of museums' locations and spaces, which exist to preserve and promote humanity's art and artifacts. These objects are the heart of the museum: they set the space apart, drive the interpretation, and ultimately, affect the individuals that engage with and activate them.

MWPAI Museum of Art is not alone in our efforts to evolve in order to remain relevant and attract visitors of all ages and interests. Museum Family Days and First Friday events were engineered for welcoming a wider

variety of visitors and were built around an array of exciting and engaging activities that all make connections to the museum exhibitions: craft making for young and old, scavenger hunts, vendor fairs, performances and demonstrations, and gallery talks. These offerings attracted an audience that may have only come to the museum on those days, feeling comfortable that there are performances, presentations, and activities to watch and do as part of a larger community, with opportunities to experience and learn about the exhibitions in ways that appealed to them. At these events visitors could also discover the interpretive activities in the galleries that offered similar opportunities for learning and connection on an ongoing basis. Sharing the multisensory and activating programming that the museum offers year-round at special events like Family Days invited new participants to find meaningful connections with art objects, and may have inspired them to spend more time with those objects on future visits.

While COVID-19 rages, in-person guided tours aren't feasible, and exhibition interactives like scent stations and "please touch" panels, as well as group events like Family Days and First Fridays, are entirely out of the question. People lament the social isolation they are experiencing, compounded by the stress of the consequences of the pandemic. Perhaps it comes as no surprise that MWPAL's virtual Art and Yoga program attendance has remained constant, as a calming practice, with a familiar formula and guiding figures. General survey respondents' comments like, "Thank you for asking our opinions. I miss Munson," "I love Munson Williams and hope that we can keep it alive in as many ways as possible," and "I understand how difficult this must be for the museum and hope that it will thrive going forward," suggest a level of empathy usually reserved for friends and family.

Communication and interaction with visitors since the onset of COVID-19 suggests that the relationship between the museum

FIG. 6

Thomas Cole
(English, 1801–
1848; active
United States,
after 1818), *The
Voyage of Life:
Manhood*, 1840.
Oil on canvas,
64 x 91 in. (162.6
x 231.1 cm).
Munson-Williams-
Proctor Arts
Institute, museum
purchase, 55.107



and the visitor are the components in an extraordinary and mutually rewarding relationship that has, so far, been propped up through virtual contact but that is rooted in past physical experiences, associations, and community. Additional communication—surveys, phone calls, and personalized emails—have yielded further meaningful interactions and revealed or perhaps cultivated deeper connections. It has been an opportunity to reflect on the museum/visitor dynamic and a reminder of the necessity to keep it vital. As one responder expressed it, “Just can’t wait for it to reopen . . . I miss the place itself.”

Museums continue to seek out ways to remain relevant and meaningfully engage a broad audience, which might best serve their visitors when the experience is grounded in an embrace of the objects and the spaces visitors find compelling. They may nevertheless be both social and socially distant by participating in interactives experienced on an individual—or distanced—basis. For the Louvre Museum in Paris this may be a virtual reality inspection of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* (1503) and for our museum might include a virtual reality ride down river rapids like those depicted in Thomas Cole’s 1840 painting *Voyage of Life: Manhood* (fig. 6). Perhaps as with the *Imagine Van Gogh* exhibit, visitors to MWPAI might experience a contemplative walk among ten-foot-high projections of details of Norman Lewis’s *Heroic Evening* (1963), which includes the sound of the music that could be heard on the streets of Harlem at the time, bringing an entirely new perspective to, and prompting a closer look at, the actual artwork. Experiences such as these enable museums to consider ways to build on their traditions while remaining true to their ethos and open to incorporating methods of engagement that enhance and promote that essence and best serve the appreciation of the cultural achievements they preserve. ■

- 1 See, for example, the Museum Workout at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/events/programs/met-live-arts/museum-workout>.
- 2 “About the Museum,” Rubin Museum of Art, <https://rubinmuseum.org/about>.
- 3 “Adidas: Art and Yoga,” Brooklyn Museum of Art, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/calendar/event/art_yoga_november_2019.
- 4 John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, “The Physical Context,” in *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2000), 57.
- 5 Laurajane Smith, “Embodied Performance of Museum Visiting,” in *The Sentient Archive*, ed. Bill Bissell and Linda Caruso Haviland (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 138.
- 6 Jason Farago, “Why Museums are the New Churches,” Culture (blog), BBC, July 16, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20150716-why-museums-are-the-new-churches?ocid=ww.social.link.email>.
- 7 Paul Goldberger, “Architecture, Sacred Space, and the Challenge of the Modern” (presentation, Chautauqua Institution, Chautauqua, New York, August 12, 2010).
- 8 Falk and Dierking, “The Physical Context,” 55, 63.
- 9 See Charlotte Beaudoin, “Integrating Somatic Learning into Everyday Life,” *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne De L’éducation* 24, no. 1 (1999): 76–80; Sandra Kerka, “Somatic/Embodied Learning and Adult Education,” *Trends and Issues Alert*, no. 32 (2002), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED462550.pdf>.
- 10 See Tom Ireland, “What Does Mindfulness Meditation Do to Your Brain?,” *Scientific American*, June 12, 2014, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/what-does-mindfulness-meditation-do-to-your-brain/>.
- 11 The American Alliance of Museums Collections Stewardship Standards statement includes the requirement that a museum must have “processes in place that regularly monitor environmental conditions and have proactive measures to mitigate the effects of ultraviolet light, fluctuations in temperature and humidity, air pollution, damage, pests and natural disasters on collections.” “Collections Stewardship Standards,” Ethics, Standards, and Professional Practices, American Alliance of Museums, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/collections-stewardship-standards/>.
- 12 Stephan Schwan, Alejandro Grajal, and Doris Lewalter, “Understanding and Engagement in Places of Science Experience: Science Museums, Science Centers, Zoos, and Aquariums,” *Educational Psychologist* 49, no. 2, 70–85.
- 13 Doreen Caravajal, “Meeting the ‘Mona Lisa’ for an Intimate (Virtual) Rendezvous,” *New York Times*, October 15, 2019.

**LETTING GO
SURRENDERING
AUTHORITY AND
EMBRACING THE
NON-MUSEUM
EXPERT**

DAMON REAVES

Head of Education, National Gallery of Art; Former Berton and Sallie Korman
Associate Curator of Education, Community Engagement and Access,
Philadelphia Museum of Art

“It’s important that we retain a position of authority.” This simple comment was made by a colleague at the end of a daylong workshop on contemporary practices in art museums. A small cross-departmental team including staff from curatorial, membership, visitor services, education, and the executive offices had just finished listening to representatives from three different institutions talk about ways in which their museums were opening up the experience of engaging with contemporary art and artists. A common theme throughout the presentations was the importance of shifting museums toward a more visitor-centered model. After a discussion we broke into small groups to consider ways our institution could empower visitors. During that small group brainstorm session, my colleague expressed concern for the potential loss of authority. The comment stuck with me; something about the idea felt so absolute that it made me uncomfortable. Days after the workshop ended, my mind returned to this comment with a goal of fully unpacking its meaning.

Are museums the voice of authority? Is that how we are viewed by our communities? If so, how did we earn this position?

Traditionally, museums have been comfortable claiming this role, embracing the idea that we have assembled the greatest objects and scholars under one roof. Museums are premised on the idea that we are the record keepers of culture, and within our walls are secret insights into history, science, and art that we can share with you, the visitor. We have a wealth of knowledge and we’re here to give that to you. We are the *experts*. This classic model of museums as the gatekeepers of knowledge has defined—and in some cases validated—our existence for centuries.

I am a museum educator. I oversee community engagement and accessibility for the Philadelphia Museum of Art. I regularly interact with a public that engages with the museum and with a public that very specifically avoids it. My work involves

going out beyond the building and meeting our neighbors in their communities. That includes actively seeking out people who do not visit the museum. As part of my practice I regularly attend community meetings and events where I ask people about their interaction (or lack thereof) with the museum. I've heard from people who feel unrepresented in our galleries and excluded from our programming, which leads to a perception that museums are elitist structures

Can we truly claim to be a voice of authority when, historically, our institution has failed to provide equal representation and has lacked input from diverse perspectives?

with little relevance to “normal” people. This feeling of distance between the museums and the community leads to a distrust of the institution and a failure on the part of the museum to fully represent the people it is supposed to serve. Community engagement works to build collaborations with those who might be skeptical of working with a large cultural institution. Through this continual process of collaborating, I began to acknowledge the variety of expertise that exists outside the museum field.

While it might not be surprising to question the notion of a museum's inherent authority, there was a time when challenging such a position was less straightforward. However, today's landscape is very different. With the arrival of the internet and social media it has

become easier to present multiple narratives and challenge traditional monolithic power structures. For example, the music industry used to have incredible power over creating hit songs, controlling which songs were put into heavy rotation on the radio and which songs most of the population had access to. Today YouTube, Bandcamp, and other streaming services have disrupted the traditional model and, with it, the industry's control. The process has been decentralized. While the industry does still wield enormous power and influence, now there are multiple channels for sharing a variety of narratives with growing communities.

In addition to changing landscapes of communication, current discussions around inclusion, diversity, equity, and access have brought renewed focus to the complicated colonial history of museums. People are more aware of—and appropriately more empowered to speak against—our history of racial inequity and problematic object acquisition. At the Philadelphia Museum of Art curators are currently working on a reinstallation of our American Art galleries. The project has raised numerous questions about the types of objects in our collection and whose narratives we are privileging. As a whole, Philadelphia tends to highlight the city's history with abolitionism at the expense of acknowledging its role as a major port in the transatlantic slave trade. Conversations around equity and inclusion have pushed the city to start acknowledging the economic effects of slavery with markers identifying the history of enslaved Africans. Similarly, the museum is working to create an installation that better reflects the rich and complex history of American art, one that includes the narratives of Indigenous people, women, enslaved people, and free Black artists and artisans. Curating is a process of making choices in order to craft a story. Traditionally, museums have taken a limited and biased approach to storytelling. Can we truly claim to be a voice of authority when, historically,

our institution has failed to provide equal representation and has lacked input from diverse perspectives?

What does it look like to acknowledge expertise beyond our own industry? What are some models of programming to help museums relax our sense of control and open up possibilities for a more inclusive dialogue in the galleries? Museum education departments often play a primary role in starting this conversation and allowing for a greater sense of shared expertise across diverse groups of individuals. While we shouldn't rely solely on programming—true institutional change shouldn't be siloed in a single department—the flexibility of programming allows an easy entry point for experimentation. The following three examples of recent program initiatives at the Philadelphia Museum of Art show the institution's efforts to call in new audiences and increase the relevance of our collection by surrendering various degrees of control and authority.

The Light Touch: Community Conversations

Community Conversations is a gallery talk series that spotlights objects in the museum's collection as opportunities for hosting socially relevant discussions about contemporary issues. The program started during the 2016–17 exhibition *Vlisco: African Fashion on a Global Stage*. The wax-printed textiles that were featured in the exhibition are heavily associated with West Africa but were designed and made in Europe; the company Vlisco is based in the Netherlands. The exhibition brought to light complex conversations around naming, ownership, identity, colonialism, and cultural appropriation. While these conversations were not unexpected, they were not built into the show's didactics. The installation instead focused on unpacking the process of wax resist dyeing while highlighting the work of an international set of designers. Visitors were left to wonder about the relationship between the Dutch textile company and West African designers. Because the exhibition was

FIG. 1

Community Conversations in action at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



presented within a suite of shows collectively titled *Creative Africa*, responders on social media expressed confusion about why the products of a Dutch company were being presented as African fashion. Charges of postcolonial blindness, misleading advertising, and cultural insensitivity followed.

To address this gap in the exhibition's didactics, we created Community Conversations. The program follows a fairly simple format: visitors sit in a circle facing a work of art and museum educators introduce a prompt and facilitate the conversation that follows. It's important to note that this is not a lecture. In this case, museum staff are not there to provide a list of facts or insightful stories. It is not a school tour with a specific agenda or desired outcome. Instead, Community Conversations privileges visitors' voices, and their personal expertise in a variety of areas drives the discussion. Museum staff move back and are there to moderate dialogue among the participants.

Community Conversations provides a space for visitors to relate personal experiences to objects in the gallery (fig. 1). The program focuses on what kind of discussions the works inspire, especially more socially engaged topics. The practice encourages the community of participants to create relevance based on their knowledge and experiences. The complex history of Vlisco and African fashion design initiated a discussion on cultural appreciation versus appropriation. In spring 2017, Goya prints framed a conversation on war photography and documentation in the era of Instagram. In winter 2019, Victorian fashion dolls were the catalyst for conversations on childhood play and gender identity.

When it comes to the idea of surrendering control to people outside the museum, Community Conversations represents a fairly light touch. A museum educator still facilitates and brings their knowledge to the discussion. They choose the artwork

FIG. 2

A local National Park Service ranger leads a Detour of the American art galleries.



and theme and draft the initial prompts. In this case, the museum invites the visitors to participate in the final stage of interpretation. So what happens when we engage the visitor earlier in the process?

A Deeper Dive: Detours

Gallery tours are the foundation of museum educational programming. It's what we do. It's who we are. As our core offer, gallery tours have been imagined, reimagined, deconstructed, and reconstructed in many ways over the decades. One such reconceptualization is Detours, which have been described as unconventional tours for the adventurous and gallery explorations with the “wrong” expert. For Detours, staff in the public programs department, which is housed within the museum's division of education, invite outside collaborators to create tours of the museum collection based on their personal areas of expertise. These tours occur monthly as part of the museum's Final Fridays initiative, which often highlights collaborations and more “experimental” programs.

Detours bring new insights to works of art by celebrating the wealth of knowledge that exists outside the museum field. Imagine taking a tour of American landscape painting led by a National Park Service ranger or exploring the collection through a lens of gender expression with a transgender rights activist (fig. 2). Local medical students led a Detour where they used close observation to diagnose potential ailments the subjects of paintings might be experiencing. Other Detours have been led by folk musicians, a sex positive therapist, a burlesque dancer, a mindfulness meditation practitioner, and an astrologer. The key to this program is that the tour is created and led by the outside expert.

Community Conversations and Detours are both rooted in the understanding that our experiences with art are multidimensional. We bring our full selves to the galleries when we

There is value in learning the history of the art, the life of the artist, and the techniques used to create the object, and there is also value in approaching the work through a non-art history lens.

visit. That includes our heritage, professional experience, and complex identities. Intersectionality is a way of understanding people's overlapping identities—particularly as they relate to systems of privilege, power, and oppression. A queer African American Muslim woman experiences the world through systems of homophobia, racial discrimination, Islamophobia, and gender inequity simultaneously. The key to intersectionality is the understanding that we are all of our identities all the time. We don't stop being any part of ourselves when experiencing life. Taking this concept further, we don't stop being any part of ourselves when viewing art. There is value in learning the history of the art, the life of the artist, and the techniques used to create the object, and there is also value in approaching the work through a non-art history lens.

Detours may not teach new facts about a specific artwork, but they always provide new insights by viewing the work through a new and often contemporary lens. History and facts may still be presented, just not the ones we usually privilege. Detour guides are encouraged to bring their passions, interests, and insights to frame portions of the collection. Imagine touring the museum's recent exhibition *Fabulous Fashion: From Dior's New Look to Now* led by members of the house-ballroom community, viewing

FIG. 3

Members of Philadelphia's house-ballroom community lead a Detour of *Fabulous Fashion: From Dior's New Look to Now*.



fashion through the lens of a queer subculture of voguing and runway where balls offer freedom of expression for people—particularly transgender and queer people of color—that fall outside mainstream gay culture (fig. 3). A traditional tour might focus on the importance of an individual costume in the history of fashion or the notoriety of a particular designer. Instead, this Detour focused on the complex role these garments played in the once underground house-ballroom scene, where presenting a “real”/passing image was key (fig. 4). While offering more authority to outside experts than Community Conversations, Detours still allow the institution to remain firmly in control of access by managing the objects on view, the timing of the program, the cost of admission, and so on. The program moves one step closer to relinquishing control, but the museum remains firmly established as gatekeeper.

FIG. 4

Another stop on the *Fabulous Fashion Detour*.





Going All In: The PHLA Kitchen

In August 2017, social practice artist Jeanne Van Heeswijk was commissioned by the museum to create a multipart project that explored the relationship between the museum and the city. The result, *Philadelphia Assembled*, involved over one hundred collaborators from across Philadelphia and culminated in an exhibition that took over the museum's Perelman Building. Guided by Amanda Sroka, assistant curator of contemporary art, *Philadelphia Assembled* became a complex study in community engagement, institutional reach, and social practice experimentation. While *Philadelphia Assembled* is too large to explore in its entirety here, I want to highlight one of its particularly noteworthy elements: the Philadelphia Assembled (PHLA) Kitchen.

Conversations over shared meals were an important component of building



The true authority for museums can come from creating a space for convening: a hub for various experts to gather together with the goal of creating greater access, understanding, and relevance between people and art.

Philadelphia Assembled, so when the exhibition came to the museum there was a desire to host those types of gatherings. This led to the creation of the PHLA Kitchen, an experiment that saw the museum (and, by extension, our catering partner Constellation) surrender control of one of the museum cafeterias to a group of culinary artists and

community cooks (fig. 5). The PHLA Kitchen team collaborated to create a series of menus that directly related to the exhibition themes of resistance, survival, and victory. The recipes for the items offered in each menu held cultural and personal meaning for the collaborators. They pulled from techniques and ingredients with deep historical resonance to oppressed peoples and from acts of resistance. However, this was more than just a guest chef program. Rather than merely inviting in a celebrity chef or adding thematic food offerings to align with the exhibition, the PHLA Kitchen was a fully realized and programed part of the exhibition (fig. 6).

The museum’s café design features sleek white walls and minimal metal tables. However, for PHLA Kitchen, the collaborators reimagined the space with brightly colored walls and large wooden tables intended to invite strangers to dine together. The black-and-white photographs that had decorated the walls were replaced with altars—objects from the personal kitchens of the culinary artists,

FIG. 5

Visitors enjoy PHLA Kitchen.



FIG. 6

Storyteller Denise Valentine speaks to guests at PHLA Kitchen.



including books, cookware, and photographs of family. Food from the PHLA Kitchen was served on dishes that were in part crowd-sourced from the collaborators and museum staff, therefore bringing our personal kitchens into the public restaurant. Dining in the kitchen was designed to be a communal experience: visitors often sat with people they did not know, and the culinary artists visited each table to provide insights into the histories and stories behind the food (fig. 7). Guests were also invited to share their stories and recipes related to the themes. The PHLA Kitchen also featured a series of programs, including cooking demonstrations and teach-ins on food justice. A related publication that included stories and recipes along with a series of postcards served as further interpretive material to enhance the dining experience (fig. 8).

From conception to execution it was the collaborators, not the museum, that created the PHLA Kitchen. The team of community cooks controlled every item that was on sale in the cafeteria and set the prices as well. To be clear, there were restrictions. Negotiating an exception to our caterer's exclusive contract was particularly challenging as was

navigating assorted city, state, and federal regulations. In addition, the changes made to the cafeteria's decor had to be reversible. Despite these limitations, the culinary artists were able to exercise a great deal of control in creating a unique experience within the museum. It was one of the most successful portions of the exhibition. Visitors were surprised and delighted by the experience. The menu rotated on a monthly basis—one menu iteration for each of the three themes. Offerings included mieng lettuce wraps, Mississippi hot tamales, chiquetaille de morue, turmeric grits over wilted dandelion greens, and the “people’s peas” (fig. 9).

The PHLA Kitchen left a lasting impression on both visitors and staff, with many commenting on how much they miss the program, even a year later. This unique experience was only possible because the museum worked to actively relinquish control and turn to the expertise of the community-based culinary artists. We could have asked our food services contractors to create dishes related to the exhibition, put out a call for recipes, or hosted a one-off program with a visiting chef. Instead, because we committed to this program as an integral part of the

FIG. 7

Culinary artist Khaliah D. Pitts introduces visitors to the PHLA Kitchen survival menu.



FIG. 8

From Our Kitchens: Recipes from the Philadelphia Assembled Kitchen



exhibition, our collaborators' vision for the PHLA Kitchen was a success. Their knowledge of food justice, community-based cooking, and the historic relationships that minority communities have with specific ingredients was the foundation for crafting the vision of an altogether different museum dining experience. The museum couldn't have created it ourselves. In fact, the very idea of creating the PHLA Kitchen wasn't on the museum's radar. The concept for the kitchen came from the *Philadelphia Assembled* collaborators. They saw a gap in the program, identified a need, and proposed a way to deepen our interaction with our audiences. It was necessary for the museum to take a step back. The institution had to acknowledge that we didn't have all the answers or even know all the right questions to ask. By relaxing our control, we were able to host an incredibly successful experience that became one of the defining aspects of the exhibition.

These projects are small examples of ways in which the Philadelphia Museum of Art has attempted to open up our practice and allow for a greater sense of shared expertise with the community. I think the most radical practice in museum education exists in this space. This isn't to say we should dismiss our own expertise or deny the various skill sets and years of experience we bring to the table. In an article for the blog *Museums 2.0* titled "The Future of Authority: Platform Power," Nina Simon writes: "Museums should feel protective of the expertise reflected in their staff, exhibits, programs, and collections. In most museums, the professional experience of the staff—to preserve objects, to design exhibits, to deliver programs—is not based on content control. It's based on creation and delivery of experiences."

I take this a step further to suggest that we allow ourselves to recognize that our internal expertise is just one part of the story. The true authority for museums can come from creating a space for convening: a hub for various experts to gather together



FIG. 9

Food from the PHLA Kitchen.

with the goal of creating greater access, understanding, and relevance between people and art. Education departments are uniquely positioned to play a critical role moving this work forward, slowly generating opportunities for inviting in a diverse range of voices, not at the exclusion of our own expertise, but in order to enrich and enhance it. If we are going to be the keepers of culture, then it's imperative to understand the multiplicity of voices that exists within any space. Any given person's community history, lived experiences, personal passions, and focused education cumulatively foster their own expertise, which could provide valuable new insights about art and culture, among other subjects. Providing a platform for multiple voices is the only way to really establish any sense of authority. ■

1 Nina Simon, "The Future of Authority: Platform Power," *Museum 2.0* (blog), October 8, 2008, <http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2008/10/future-of-authority-platform-power.html>.

**A RADICAL
PROGRAM
CURATING A
CULTURE OF
RESPECT**

RONNA TULGAN OSTHEIMER

Director of Education, Clark Art Institute

To think about Curating a Culture of Respect (CCR) as a *radical* program almost seems like an oxymoron. The yearlong program connects middle-school students with art museums to contemplate human nature and social issues and encourages students to be more cognizant of their own personal power in shaping positive futures. Although it is a “kind and gentle” program, fundamentally rooted in traditional humanistic goals, it can be considered radical in three ways. First, historically, museum education has been an academic endeavor, focusing on teaching about art, from a perspective of either art history or aesthetics rather than psychosocial development; with CCR, the primary goal is affective learning, or learning that focuses on understanding the feelings, emotions, and even the behavior of oneself and others, in contrast to cognitive learning. Second, typically a school visit to an art museum is a one-time experience meant to support an area of the curriculum or to give students a cultural experience; with CCR, we are developing sustained relationships with teachers and

students and working with educators to integrate new approaches (affective or social-emotional teaching) into their practice, including a more conscious awareness of their own relationships with students and colleagues and the interpersonal dynamics within their classroom. And lastly, CCR suggests a new model for public education—one in which schools partner with other institutions, in this case art museums—to meet the changing and varied educational needs of our nation’s youth.

CCR began as a FRAME (French American Museum Exchange) program with the express goal of violence prevention, focusing on issues from bullying to terrorism. In 2013, both countries were mandating that school systems develop programs to combat bullying. CCR was born from an eagerness to demonstrate that engaging with historic art can be socially relevant and can be focused on just about any current issue. In 2013, the Clark piloted CCR with a charter school that was dedicated to the arts, and in 2014, we instituted CCR as a regular program, working with both the

Engaging with art then offers a unique opportunity for exploring and discussing the human condition or contemplating what it means to be a human being.

charter school and a local middle school, comprising about two hundred students and ten teachers in total. In 2017, our fourth full program year, we invited a third school from a neighboring town to join the project (adding another one hundred students and five teachers). We continue to work with the two original schools in the program; the third school participated in the fourth year only. CCR is based on the Clark's educational philosophy that art museum education is about helping people *engage* with art—interact with it in a way that fosters personal meaning and connection—rather than teaching about it. Since 2010, the Clark's education department has operated from a working understanding of art as the reflection or expression of human experience, imagination, and values. For our practice of museum education, this working definition suggests that viewer interpretation is significant in understanding a work of art, and that art can be relevant to anyone, even those with critical perspectives. Engaging with art then offers a unique opportunity for exploring and discussing the human condition or contemplating what it means to be a human being.

This understanding departs from what is commonly understood as the traditional purposes of museum education, and it is congruent with a larger paradigm shift that is happening for museums, both in terms of mission and in terms of what our publics expect from us. Museums are changing from

institutions that collect, care for, and serve as the authoritative source of information about culturally valuable objects to institutions that collect, care for, and share objects that have been considered culturally valuable as sources for socially significant dialogue. The role of museum education under this new conception of an art museum is to facilitate conversations about objects rather than serve as the expert on them. While this evolving conception of museum education still includes sharing information, it also involves encouraging and validating different ideas about this information and acknowledging ambiguities.

For most school group visits, a gallery talk is tailored to an area of curricular study, and students learn about artworks in relation to their knowledge of that subject. Our goal is to show how engaging with art can offer an additional dimension of understanding the subject matter with a focus on human experience. The express purpose of the CCR program is to engage with art as a vehicle for exploring and validating human experience and potential, sharing personally and socially meaningful conversations, and facilitating affective development, an area outside the typical school curriculum.

As mentioned, the initial purpose of the program was violence prevention. CCR involved engaging students with art that depicted human violence to raise awareness about the nature of violence—the shapes it takes, the reasons for it, and the consequences of it. The idea was that students would realize the negative consequences of violence and recognize that non-violence may always be a viable and more productive possibility. This awareness would lead to greater control of their own behavior, and even a sense of responsibility to avoid, prevent, and diffuse violent situations.

During the first year of CCR, we realized that though we focused on artwork with the theme of violence, our conversations were

much more dynamic and were not as clear-cut as we had first anticipated. Conversations explored justifications for violence such as fear, pride, courage, and misunderstanding; students and teachers were much more appreciative of the complexities and nuances of situations than we presumed when we planned the program. We recognized that focusing so specifically on violence was misguided and futile at best and could be preachy and authoritarian at worst. We also became aware that students and teachers were eager to have open-ended conversations about human experience and to have an opportunity to talk about ideas and situations that mattered to them.

It was clear that the prescribed intention of violence prevention was limiting rather than helpful. So with the hope that we would still serve the original goal of violence prevention along with broader aims, we changed the articulated purpose of the program to a more general focus: contemplating human

nature, including our own, and focusing on the potential for constructive interaction with the world. We also invited two other local museums, the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), to collaborate with us in hosting the program during its second year, because we wanted to expose students to a greater range of art and reflected human themes and issues. Additionally, working with three different museums would model the message that art is important to diverse groups and that engaging with art can help people and societies lead more constructive and satisfying lives, in a variety of ways (fig. 1).

The program requires a significant commitment for all involved, as museum educators work with entire grades, students and teachers, across disciplines throughout the school year. Students visit each museum at least once. The visit to the Clark, whose collection focuses on American and European

FIG. 1

CCR students making T-shirts featuring the words “art can change the world” as part of a session at the Clark.



art, is first, and scheduled early in the fall. Many of the students have been to the Clark before and have experienced a typical gallery talk in which there was a specific curriculum-related focus. One goal of this first visit is to demonstrate the defining difference of CCR—that the students are visiting art museums for the purpose of philosophical contemplation and connecting as human beings. The Clark visit also serves as an introduction to the program and the ethos of museum education—the idea that engaging with art can orient and ground us in the value of humanity (our own, others, and in general)—thus establishing our definition of art, and the message that lived human experience matters.

Students spend a full school day at the Clark, beginning with an overview of the program and open-ended discussions about art. They visit the galleries and have conversations about their perspectives and interpretations of select works that have compelling and often ambiguous narratives, they participate in art-making activities, and they complete

assignments developed by their classroom teachers designed to bridge the museum experience with classroom learning (fig. 2). The program is staff-intensive; the entire education team, as well as four docents, spend the day devoted to this program, in addition to spending significant time on preparation beforehand.

In the middle of the year, the students visit WCMA. There the groups focus on the power of the individual to make a difference in the world. In the spring, the students visit MASS MoCA and, building on the ideas from the previous museum visits, focus on how art can make the world a better place, or how art can have a role in social justice. The students work with an exhibiting resident artist at MASS MoCA and participate in a related culminating art-making experience at the end of the school year.

In addition to multiple museum visits and a variety of related activities, involved teachers make a commitment to integrate themes and

FIG. 2

CCR students working on an assignment in the galleries.



methodologies from the program into their classroom teaching. We offer paid professional development sessions at the beginning and end of each school year, and before and after each museum visit—eight sessions in all—in which the teachers from all the schools join together. The teachers and museum educators from all three museums end up spending a lot of time together (and a lot of time in general on this program). During these sessions, we collectively prepare for the museum visits. The classroom teachers share how we might shape our approach to make curricular connections, as well as how they have integrated learning from the program into their teaching and interpersonal interactions with students and other adults in their school buildings. Museum educators also share art education pedagogy—our philosophy and methodology—with teachers. Teachers connect and coordinate with colleagues from other schools and from other disciplines within their schools, often collaborating on developing and designing related ideas for lessons and activities. And, just as importantly, we forge real relationships. In many ways, these professional development sessions have become akin to a support group for all of us, as we take time to talk about our practice, brainstorm innovative and multi-disciplinary lesson plans with colleagues, solicit and share feedback and suggestions, and discuss issues impacting children today. Consistently, the teachers report that the time is important to them and is a relief from the pressures on them for content-driven learning and related testing. Many have thanked us for this time, because it reminds them that they are impacting lives, not only relaying subject matter.

These sessions, as well as the development and facilitation of the program, have been meaningful to our education team at the Clark, too. In addition to allowing us to work more closely with teachers and students, CCR has given us new understandings of our practice, both stretching and clarifying our sense of “what we may be” as art museum educators. In many ways the gallery talk portion of the CCR visit is similar to a typical school group

gallery talk. We have conversations that are focused on works of art in relation to a particular interest or area of study, in this case in relation to understanding human experience. What differs is that this focus is open-ended and can involve issues that are personally important to participants. These conversations can be intimate and intense, and their facilitation requires sensitivity and self-awareness on the part of the museum educator, beyond what may be required in a more typical gallery talk—though as we shift to a goal of engaging with art rather than teaching about art, these skills and dispositions are emerging as critical to our general practice as well.

This has implications for training. But our purpose is not to offer art therapy (addressing personal psychological situations through art), and we are not qualified to do so. Nevertheless, CCR has helped us realize that art museum education can absolutely be therapeutic, in both an individual and collective way. Because the distinction was a little blurry, we felt we needed to articulate the difference out of a sense of professional integrity. Ironically, our experience with CCR not only spotlighted the concern, it also offered a way out of the dilemma. Though the program started with the explicit intent to engage with art as a starting point for contemplating the human condition, it became clear that the focus on art was fundamental to the entire program, from beginning to end. CCR was not only about the human experiences of the participants, but also how these experiences could be understood and even reimaged by engaging with works of art. It is this object-focused practice that distinguishes art museum education from therapy. Our experience with CCR has made us more clearly aware that our greatest strength—and perhaps our defining quality—is in demonstrating the power of art and the truths that it can offer about human experience (which can also help us process our own experiences).

The responses to the program from participants suggest that the learning experience has been as profound for them as it has been for us. We collect feedback from teachers and students at least once during each program cycle. We have learned a great deal from the informal feedback, both spoken and written, about the impact and implications of the program, and about the lived experience of young people in today's world. Most of all, we have learned that this program has had an important effect on the participants—students, teachers, and even their families.

Almost across the board, students report that CCR is significant to them and is a positive experience. Parents have also reported that the experience is unique, special, and important, and that their children talk about the program at home. When asked what they have learned from participating in CCR, student responses have included, “Art can help center me” and “I guess I can make a difference in the world if I believe I can.” In some cases, students' feedback has been much more personal: “As a transgender teen, I was really scared about middle school. CCR has helped me feel comfortable being different. I think it has made it less cool for my peers to make fun of others.”

However, not all feedback is laudatory of the museums themselves. During a discussion at the end of a visit to the Clark, one student shared, “I feel like a place like the Clark is not for my people.” Although the comment was uncomfortable for us to hear, and probably uncomfortable for the student to make, within the context of CCR, a culture had been established that normalized difficult and honest conversations (fig. 3). We seized the comment as a learning opportunity for all, thanking the student for giving her perspective, which is an important one for the museum to understand. In response, we facilitated a conversation about how different places can make us feel, and discussed injustice and disturbing truths about our nation's history and institutions, including racism. Our conversation also included a critical examination of the complicity of art and art museums, content that we would not typically have the opportunity to discuss with a school group. That critical comment became a high point of the program. The unexpected conversation proved the strength of the program and reemphasized that the goal of CCR isn't really to learn about art but instead to engage with art in order to talk about things that matter on a human level (fig. 4). The conversation hopefully made the

FIG. 3

CCR students in discussion.



FIG. 4

CCR students doing an end-of-the-day processing activity on the Fernández Terrace.



museum feel more relevant and welcoming to this student (and to any others who may have also been thinking what she was courageous enough to say aloud). That conversation took place in 2017, three years before the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent widespread recognition of systemic racism in our society, including in cultural institutions. The discussion may offer a model for institutions that have perpetuated privileged narratives in the past to move forward in new ways that are more relevant to more people.

Examples of feedback from teachers suggest that the program has positively impacted their relationships with students. One teacher shared that “there is a carryover in the classroom from getting to know the kids personally at the museums,” and another explained that “CCR has created a bond between me and my students that had not developed in the classroom and this helps me understand their thinking and be a better teacher.” Another teacher said that “CCR has reminded me of the vulnerability of children today and how scary the world is for many of them.”

Regarding teachers’ relationships with colleagues and their job satisfaction, teachers have reported that “CCR helps strengthen our ties,” and “sharing this experience with my colleagues has taken our understanding of each other and our work to a different level. The program gave us a chance and an arena to form deeper relationships that go beyond our disciplines.” Other teachers expressed that “education is full of stress for students and teachers right now in part because of high-stakes testing. CCR has added light to a dark world,” and they “feel respected and treated as professionals in the CCR program.”

The program has impacted how teachers do their jobs, too. Comments such as “I approached an activity on genetics in a whole new way because of CCR” and “CCR activities have aided my ability to view through multiple perspectives, an essential skill when planning lessons for all my students” suggest that teachers are thinking more holistically about their students, rather than in the more narrow terms of test scores

or information and skill attainment. Teachers from other schools in the county have heard about the program and have asked to join. Unfortunately, given the intensive time and focus demanded by the program, we have not been able to expand the program with new schools. It is clear, though, that the program has “struck a nerve,” and may suggest new dimensions for the profession, practice, and role of museum education. CCR is at least meeting a need or filling a void in the psychosocial development of today’s children.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 required public schools and teachers to focus on standardized content delivery creating increasingly bureaucratic systems and curricular requirements. As a result, for nearly twenty years psychosocial development of students has not been a recognized domain or priority for schools to formally address, even though numerous studies have shown that affective education supports academic learning and teacher satisfaction. While extremely unfortunate for many reasons, this lack of attention to psychosocial development is particularly troubling because children today need affective education perhaps more than ever. According to statistics from the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 20 percent of our nation’s children suffer from clinical anxiety and/or depression, suicide is the second-leading cause of death in youth aged ten to twenty-four (up from the third-leading cause just one year ago), and the suicide attempt rate has tripled in the last three years for this age group. Drug use and crime are also at an all-time high for teenagers.

Humanistic psychology, the branch of psychology developed in the mid-twentieth century that studies psychosocial health, suggests that feeling recognized and valued as a unique human being by others and having a sense of belonging in community are critical to healthy human functioning. In our increasingly digital world, this need is not being met for many children and is likely

Museum education can help people connect with humanity—their own and one another’s—and with the idea of humanity in general. Museum education serves a critical purpose in contemporary society and should be seen as an essential part of formal education rather than as an enrichment activity in support of a school’s academic curriculum.

one of the reasons for the demographic’s increasing mental health problems. A growing body of research confirms the relationship between digital media and depression. In his book, *Recovering Place: Reflections on Stone Hill*, Mark Taylor, a philosopher and guest curator at the Clark in 2016, suggests that our contemporary world is actually dangerous for the human spirit. He explains that, in our overly technological, fast-paced, capitalist society, people are immersed in virtual reality and artificial values, where they are one of countless unknown others with no sense of connection to any particular place rather than belonging within a human community. Taylor argues that this anonymity is causing a modern identity crisis on both an individual and societal level that threatens our survival as a species. We are losing touch with a sense of value for our very humanity: “Technologies that were supposed to connect and integrate are creating divisions within and among individuals and are deepening the opposition

between humanity and the natural world. Globalization leads to a hyper-competitive environment in which any sense of the whole—be it personal, social, or natural—is lost.”

Art museums are in a unique position to help. As suggested in the beginning of this essay, engaging with art can be a vehicle for exploring human meaning and validating human experience as significant. Museum education can help people connect with humanity—their own and one another’s—and with the idea of humanity in general. Museum education serves a critical purpose in contemporary society and should be seen as an essential part of formal education rather than as an enrichment activity in support of a school’s academic curriculum. From our experience with CCR, we have learned that teachers need the humanizing influence as much as their students do. Our society today needs what museum education offers as much as we need formal schooling with the traditional goal of knowledge transfer. Together, schools and museums can do the best job in meeting the learning and developmental needs of our nation’s youth in today’s world. This suggests a whole new paradigm for education and for the institutions of schools and museums—with new assumptions of roles, training, how time is spent with students, and where students are educated. Schools could focus on teaching academic subjects and the cognitive domain of development, while museums could focus on reflecting on and validating human experience and the affective domain of development. Educators from both institutions would work together to coordinate goals for student learning and to support each other’s work. *Radical* indeed! Curating a Culture of Respect offers a new model for what an effective and necessary education system could, and indeed, should be.

Postscript

CCR was originally funded by a private benefactor. In 2017, our fifth program year, the funding we had to pay teachers for their professional development time was not

renewed. Without a stipend available, the third school to join the program decided to drop out. For the other two participating schools, the teachers have decided to continue the program, even without the same remuneration for their time outside of their regular school day, though their attendance is more sporadic at the professional development meetings. The reduced time between the teachers and the museum educators has definitely affected the program. Nonetheless, the schools that have chosen to continue their participation are clearly committed to the program, and have found it has had a valuable impact on their students and their own teaching practices.

CCR is a *critically* important program. But it requires resources, including the time to work together for planning and coordination and to form relationships. Collaboration between different institutions is difficult in general. A collaboration like CCR, which goes beyond working together and requires working and thinking in new ways, is even more difficult. Difficult, but worth it. ■

- 1 Rika Burnham, Elliott Kai-Kee, *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011).
- 2 FRAME is a consortium of thirty-two museums (sixteen North American museums and sixteen French museums) with the mission of promoting cultural exchange through collaborative and coordinated programs. CCR began as a project between the Clark and the Musées de Strasbourg and was initially funded with seed money from the United States embassy in Paris. Over the years, museums in Lille and Montpellier, France, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, and Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, have also joined the project.
- 3 Now that the program has been in operation for more than five years, we are planning to conduct a formal summative evaluation to measure its effects. At this point, all the feedback has been informal and formative.
- 4 National Alliance on Mental Illness, *Mental Health Facts, Children and Teens* (2018), nami.org/mhstats.
- 5 For an understanding of humanistic psychology, see Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1962), and Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), often considered the formative books of this branch of psychology by two of its primary founders.
- 6 Elizabeth Hoge, David Bickham, and Joanne Cantor, “Digital Media, Anxiety and Depression in Children,” *Pediatrics* 140, Supplement 2 (November 2017): 140.
- 7 Mark C. Taylor, *Recovering Place: Reflections on Stone Hill* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 4.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Marilyn Lajeunesse has been a museum educator at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts for over twenty-five years. Her experience includes designing gallery programs for numerous temporary exhibitions and the museum's collection, as well as writing various interpretive texts, notably audio guide scripts. She initiated the award-winning Sharing the Museum accessibility program in 1999, which has evolved to provide support to thousands of underserved individuals from health and social services. The diverse groups invited to participate in Sharing the Museum include people with physical and mental health issues, at-risk youth, homeless people, families and seniors on limited incomes, individuals suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's disease, and many more.

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Ronna Tulgan Ostheimer has worked in the education department of the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, 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 in the education department at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams. She holds an EdD in psychological education from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a BA in sociology and American studies from Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York.

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Jaime Ursic joined the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, in fall 2018 as the head of school and educator programs. She is now director of school programs and partnership. In this role she oversees a team of eleven people who execute all programs related to gallery and studio teaching, educator resources, school partnerships, tours and workshops, and teens. Previously, Ursic served as the associate curator of education for six years at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, where she worked with pre-K through 12th-grade students, educators, docents, and visitors of all abilities. Ursic holds a BFA in painting/drawing with a minor in art history and a BS in art education, museum and cultural institutions, from Pennsylvania State University, an MFA in painting/printmaking from Yale University, and an MS in leadership in museum education from Bank Street College of Education, New York.

Corinne Zimmermann is the former director of interpretation at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston. She now has a consulting practice facilitating workshops and designing art museum-based experiences for clients including art museums, healthcare organizations, and other professional groups. Areas of expertise and professional interests include interactive teaching, creative practices in gallery teaching, multidisciplinary teamwork and communication, facilitative leadership skills, and mindfulness and self-care.

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