

Gretchen Jennings
Editor

from the editor



Gretchen Jennings is the editor of the *Exhibitionist*. She may be contacted at gretchenjennings@rcn.com.

Dear Readers,

Since the mid-1990's the phrase "meaning-making" has gained prominence in the field's vocabulary. In Fall 1999 the *Exhibitionist*, under the editorship of Jay Rounds, published "Making Meaning in Exhibits." This issue remains our most popular of all time, based on the number of requests for back issues over the years. Now out of print, it is accessible in the *Exhibitionist Archives* at www.name-aam.org. We thought it was time to take a new look at this important topic.

In our Call for Papers last Fall we solicited articles that would examine some of the same questions raised by editor Rounds in the opening article:

- What do we mean by "meaning"?
- What are visitors making meaning about?
- Is meaning-making an esoteric or everyday activity?
- Is meaning-making a personal or social activity?
- Do we really need to do anything about it?
- How can we tell it is working?

Further, we asked writers to reflect on Rounds' questions in light of developments in research, technology, and even the broader culture over the last decade:

- What is the current research on this topic?
- Can it include not only exhibitions but other museum activities?
- Has it changed in a more globally focused world community?
- What is the impact of new technologies on this concept?
- What is the connection between current discussions on museum authority and the concept of meaning making?
- What might be the impact of new forms of visitor-generated content and design on this concept?

The articles we publish here address a number of these questions, as well as ones we didn't think to ask—always a good thing. They recount research and reflection on science, history, and art museums. They address exhibitions, programs held in museums, and community programs that engage new contributors and new audiences for exhibitions. All of the submissions reflect in a striking way the degree to which the concept of "meaning-making" has permeated museum thinking, discourse, and research. All the more reason to take a new look at the phrase and how it is used currently. To help us in this latter task, we are fortunate to have a Commentary by Lois H. Silverman, who introduced the concept of "meaning-making" to the museum field in her Ph.D. dissertation in 1990, and whose subsequent work has shaped our understanding and application of this important paradigm.

Once you have this issue in your hands, join us for discussions on Twitter @NAMExhibitions and follow NAME on Facebook. If you are at the annual conference in Baltimore, join us for a discussion of meaning-making at the Knowledge Bar in the Exhibit Hall from 4:45 to 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 21, 2013.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Jennings