



# The MUSE Awards: Trends in New Media

by Jack Ludden

**F**ounded in 1975, The Media & Technology Professional Network of the American Alliance of Museums represents countless museum professionals who serve the field in a broad array of areas. These range from the production of media resources for interpretation, to defining standards, to the building of databases, to the creation and support of social media. As museums are changing the ways in which they develop, implement, and consider technology, we constantly look for opportunities for discourse and collaboration within the community. We aim to promote excellence in professional standards and practices and to enhance the ability of museums to serve the public. We also seek to build bridges among museum technologists, educators, curators, designers and marketers to “translate” mission critical needs into successful digital experiences. The MUSE Awards are great examples of how museum professionals are using technology to increase audience engagement.

## The MUSE Awards Highlight Trends for the Field

The MUSE Awards competition, now in its 25<sup>th</sup> year, recognizes excellence in media produced by or for museums. The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual MUSE Award winners, announced at the Alliance annual meeting in May 2013, gave us some great examples of exceptional work. M&T received hundreds of MUSE submissions from institutions around the world. The winning projects were compelling and creative. In 2013, there were fifteen MUSE Award categories. Each category had many submissions, and three key trends were clear:

- Creating effective mobile experiences;
- Building innovative digital platforms that help build long-lasting audience relationships;
- Developing elegant and innovative digital publications.

It is critical for our community to identify current trends for “how” we share and distribute interpretive material and data. Some of these pursuits include: big data management, responsive design needs, and more complex audience engagement tactics. We need to build upon these current trends to pave the way for future innovation and scholarship. Following are some of the award-winning media projects that exemplify important trends for the field.

### **Creating Effective Mobile Experiences**

One of the highlights of the 2013 MUSE Awards was the range of innovative technologies that helped transform the visitor experience. For example, *Murder at the Met: An American Art Mystery* from The Metropolitan Museum of Art (<http://www.metmuseum.org/>) is a web-based mobile game that guides users of smartphones and tablets through the galleries of American paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts. The fictional plot transports players back to an evening gala in 1899 and revolves around the murder of beautiful Virginie Gautreau. She was the woman immortalized by John Singer Sargent in the portrait *Madame X*, one of the Museum's best-known paintings. *Murder at the MET* is a wonderful example of how a mobile gaming experience connects visitors with objects.

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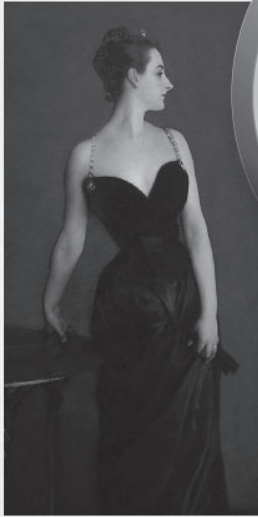


THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

# MURDER AT THE MET

## *An American Art Mystery*

Detectives needed at  
5th Ave & 82nd St



**Virginie Gautreau,  
known as *Madame X*,  
was found dead in the  
American Wing. Who could  
have done it and how?**

*Murder at the Met: An American Art Mystery. Launch screen designs were inspired by 19<sup>th</sup>-century broadsheet newspapers. Suspect and victim game pages were based on 19<sup>th</sup>-century police crime blotters. Game play was inspired by classic board games such as Clue. Courtesy of the American Alliance of Museums' Media & Technology MUSE Awards and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

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Another great example is *Sound Uncovered* from the Exploratorium (<http://www.exploratorium.edu/>). Combining surprising and playful hands-on activities with articles and rich multimedia, *Sound Uncovered* puts the visitor at the center of the experiment and looks at the science of sound. One reason mobile devices are so popular is because they facilitate discovery anywhere and at any time. Though mystery is a powerful driver of curiosity and discovery, very few iPad or iPhone apps effectively leverage mystery and confusion to educate users. One exception to this rule is the *Sound Uncovered* iPad app from the Exploratorium.

### **Building Innovative Digital Platforms**

Creating meaningful online destinations is a remarkable feat in any industry. DMA Friends is a scalable, open-source, technical infrastructure and user experience designed to incentivize and track participation and engagement by visitors to the Dallas Museum of Art (<http://www.dallasmuseumofart.org/>). Using an innovative web-based platform, visitors participate in the program through iPad-based kiosk interactions, texting from their mobile devices, and online interactivity. As visitors connect with the museum, they create personal profiles, work toward “badges,” check in to different activities, and earn rewards for progress and participation. Constant monitoring and metrics are being captured to create a deep understanding of visitor behavior in the museum which will be used to create richer and more complex offerings. DMA Friends at the Dallas Museum of Art is an effective program to engage visitors in a new and exciting way, providing an excellent model for the wider museum community.

The National Museum of Mathematics ([momath.org](http://momath.org)) uses technology throughout its new space to excite both adults and children about the evolving, creative, and often surprising nature of mathematics. The National Museum of Mathematics demonstrates the potential of building a constructivist space, one that not only tells the story of abstract mathematic concepts, but also invites the visitor to engage with these concepts. MoMATH, as its mission states, “illuminates the patterns that abound in our world,” by placing the visitor at the center in a total learning environment, surrounded by level-appropriate content. The institution’s

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use of technology furthers its mission of improving math education in America.

### **Developing Elegant and Innovative Digital Publications**

Museums continue to pursue interesting and effective ways to publish content online. *Verso: Unveiling the Backstory* is a brand-new, innovative quarterly digital publication from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (<http://new.artsmia.org/>). Created for the iPad, *Verso* gives viewers a behind-the-scenes look at art and the pursuit of artistic passions. Available for free from the App Store, *Verso* takes full advantage of the digital platform to deliver interactive multimedia content, image-rich storytelling, inter-connected

Another very successful e-publication is the *Paper Moon* e-catalogue from the Zuckerman Museum of Art (<http://www.kennesaw.edu/arts/galleries/>). Built for the iPad, this catalogue provides easy access to exhibition essays, audio clips, and related videos. It is a wonderful combination of creativity and ingenuity. It is an elegant and simple project that was cost effective and still successful in engaging audiences.

### **Forward-Thinking Projects**

This year two MUSE Award winners seem to stand out for their risk-taking and creativity. The first example immerses visitors in a digital environment like no other and transforms them into visual

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Cover of the *Paper Moon* e-catalogue. The catalogue contains audio, animation, and interactive components. Courtesy of AAM's Media & Technology MUSE Awards and The Zuckerman Museum of Art.

navigation, and self-guided exploration. This content is delivered worldwide. *Verso* gives its audience insightful backstage access to the museum, its collection, and the wider world of fine arts. This rich digital publication places collections in the hands of users in completely new ways and transforms the concept of a member's magazine.

learners. *Gallery One* at the Cleveland Museum of Art (critiqued in this issue) is an interactive space that allows visitors to forge a deeper bond with the art housed at the museum. The space brings art and ideas together to facilitate inquiry and discourse. Information is delivered in ways that feel like experiences rather than didactic lessons, allowing visitors to drive





The “Collection Wall” is conceived as a tool for visitors to browse CMA’s encyclopedic collection. It is designed to propel visitors into the galleries by giving them a taste of the objects in the collection and allowing them to create their own customized visit by downloading objects and tours to their iPad. Courtesy of Local Projects.

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**Resources:**

Contact M & T at muse@  
mediaandtechnology.org

Information on the Media and  
Technology Professional Network  
[http://aam-us.org/resources/  
professional-networks/media-  
technology](http://aam-us.org/resources/professional-networks/media-technology)

The MUSE competition  
[http://aam-us.org/about-us/  
grants-awards-and-competitions/  
muse-awards/2013-muse-awards](http://aam-us.org/about-us/grants-awards-and-competitions/muse-awards/2013-muse-awards)

their own encounters with works of art and to share their experiences with each other. It is simply remarkable.

Another successful project is the Cooper-Hewitt Collection Alpha from the Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum (<http://www.cooperhewitt.org/>). The Cooper-Hewitt Online Collections Alpha champions rapid development and data manipulation by offering an open API (Application Programming Interface). In short, this application empowers museum technologists to work creatively with Cooper-Hewitt’s collection as well as better understand how they may interact and manage their own collection data.

This project is a great example of our community sharing data and using rapid prototyping. Both these processes are going to be critical in allowing our field to grow and remain relevant in the technological world.

**Connect with Us**

The Media and Technology Professional Network is looking forward to next years’ MUSE Awards and to the Alliance’s Annual Conference. We are also excited about a number of upcoming webinars that will highlight many of the 2013 MUSE Award winners. To learn more, check the Resources list in the sidebar to this article. ✨