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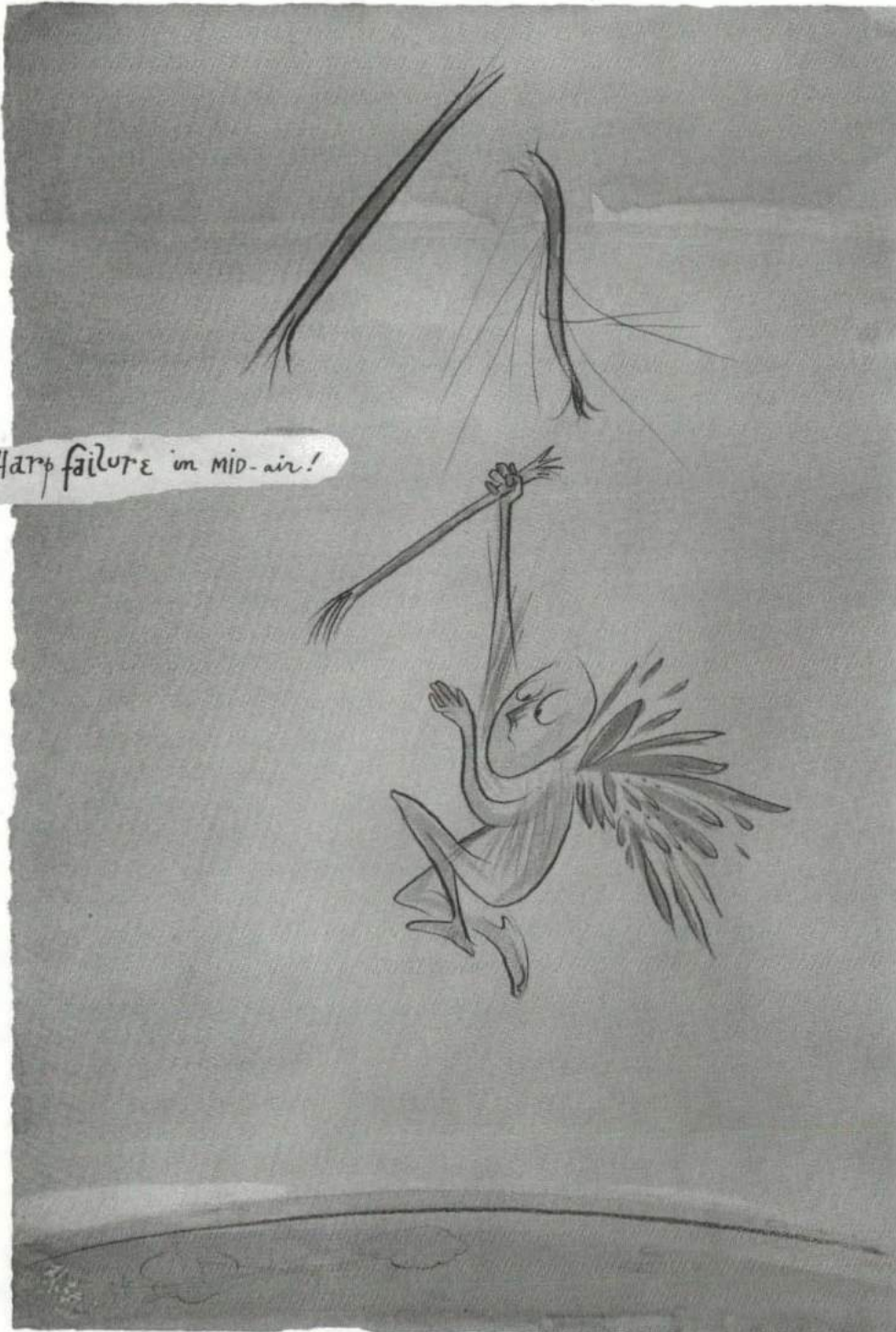
EXHIBITIONIST

NAME
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSEUM EXHIBITION

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from the president



The Transmogrification of NAME



by Kristine Hastreiter

Recently, I spent a snowy Sunday afternoon reading through my collection of *Exhibitionist* in search of creative inspiration. It is amazing how much *Exhibitionist* has evolved over the past decade. But equally noteworthy is how much NAME, as an organization, has transmogrified (my apologies to Calvin and Hobbes) since its conception in 1981.

NAME was established to aid in the professional enrichment and advancement of museum exhibition professionals and to further the goals of the museum community. NAME was designed to serve as a source of broad dissemination of information on the conception, planning, design, conservation, fabrication, installation, and maintenance of museum exhibitions and to serve those sharing these concerns. And over the years NAME has endeavored to uphold its mission, while at the same time accommodating the needs of the organization and its members. The struggle to achieve balance between these often conflicting aims has created an engaging organizational narrative which includes failures as well as successes, frustrating periods of indecision as well as moments of creative brilliance. All of which gives NAME soul. But what is the fate of NAME's soul? Are we destined to a perpetual state of transmogrification? Or could there be something else? Something new? Something different? Something more?

The Executive Officers and the Board of Directors are charged with the responsibility of overseeing NAME. However, you the members still largely influence the direction and growth of NAME. Your input, your time, your energy, and your resources make a difference. As an organization, NAME needs your encouragement and support. Your participation in fundraising events such as the NAME Dinner and Auction at the Des Lee Gallery is critical to NAME's financial well being. As is your participation in professional development opportunities such as NAME sponsored workshops, the Excellence in Exhibition Competition, and the NAME Issues Luncheon. Your participation in operational activities are also important. I need you and NAME needs you to help "man" the NAME Booth at the MuseumExpo, to attend the Annual Business Breakfast Meeting, and volunteer your leadership skills to fill the vacancies on the Board. (NAME needs a Mountain Plains Co-Rep, two Southeast Regional Co-Reps, and a Membership Chair!) Without support from the membership, NAME will only continue to transmogrify, we will never fully make it through metamorphosis.

In October, I had the opportunity to represent NAME, CurCom and RC-AAM at the National Program Committee Meeting in St. Louis. A total of 173 session proposals and 12 poster session proposals were submitted to the AAM for review by the National Program Committee. Of these, 128 sessions and 10 poster sessions were selected to be presented at the AAM Annual Meeting in St. Louis. As a reviewer for the National Program Committee I evaluated proposals for their panel diversity, concept clarity, topic importance and timeliness, and reflection of annual meeting theme. There were many dynamic and engaging proposals. NAME as an SPC submitted the most proposals. For a detailed listing of the NAME sponsored sessions, as well as the NAME events at the AAM Annual Meeting in St. Louis, see the insert in this issue.

The NAME Board convened at the AAM headquarters in Washington, D.C., on December 1st and 2nd to discuss the work accomplished since the last Board meeting (May 2000) and to develop plans for the next year.



Work continues on the Strategic Plan, the vision of what NAME will be in the new century. Key focus areas include: leadership, advancing the profession, professional practice, professional development, excellence in exhibition, and organizational operations. Excerpts from the plan are included in this issue of *Exhibitionist*, and the full draft will be unveiled at the NAME Business Breakfast at the AAM Annual Meeting. I am counting on all of you to be there so we can have a lively discussion about NAME's future! I will be looking for champions (individuals passionate about NAME) to help us make the Strategic Plan real.

your PC, do whatever it takes to become acquainted with them, for they are the soul of NAME put down in print. We will be voting on the guidelines at the Breakfast Business Meeting. If passed, the operational guidelines will go into effect with the start of the new fiscal year.

With a new strategic plan and new operational guidelines, NAME will be prepared for a future of defined change. We will be freeing the soul of NAME from transmogrification.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the AAM Annual Meeting.

Just as NAME needs a new strategic plan to guide it, it also needs an operational structure that is contemporary to the organization's current needs. Members of the Board have been reviewing and revising NAME's operational guidelines over the past few months. Included with this issue of *Exhibitionist* is a copy of the proposed new operational guidelines for the organization. Please read them over, get to know them, sleep with them under your pillow, post them on your refrigerator, scan them as a screensaver for

ERRATUM:

The cover art for the Fall 2000 issue was Mark Tansey's "Still Life." We correctly credited the Metropolitan Museum of Art for permission to use the painting, but forgot to also thank the artist himself and his representative, the Curt Marcus Gallery of New York.



Photos courtesy of WHERE Magazine

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Exhibits Newsline

by Phyllis Rabineau

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rabineau@chicagohs.org*

A month or so ago, I sent out my semi-annual call for news, and received a terrific response. First off, let's hear from Jenny Sayre Ramberg and Jeff Hoke, who hope to see a lot of colleagues visiting them at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, for *Splash Zone*, a new exhibit designed especially for families with kids 9 and younger. Jenny writes, "Jeff and I had a great time developing the exhibit and it's even more fun to see families together there. The gallery aims to capture the imagination of children and inspire a lifelong commitment to protect ocean life. It's playful—a children's museum inside an aquarium, blending live-animal experiences with hands-on learning. And it's durable, built to survive more than 1.8 million visitors a year.

"We feature nearly 60 species—from penguins to leafy sea dragons, colorful corals, moray eels and tropical sharks—and over 30 hands-on exhibits, staff-led educational programs and play areas. We draw on traditional and non-traditional materials including fiberglass rockwork, cast urethane animal models, painted MDF cutout forms layered together and bubbling walls to create an immersive ocean environment. Children can crawl through, climb on, slide down and pop up in displays as they watch and learn about the animals that call these waters home. Video is integrated throughout, as are interactive games. Ramps allow for wheelchair access.

"The exhibit resulted from years of study on how children and families learn while they're at the Aquarium, and builds on principles established by children's museums, early childhood education experts and visitor research. The Bay Area Children's Museum, Children's Discovery Museum, The Children's Museum in Indianapolis and the Boston Children's Museum were all invaluable in our research and in giving us feedback on our plans. Randi Korn and Minda Borun conducted visitor research; we're planning our final remedial evaluation for the summer of 2001. This will give us time to make changes during the five year run of the exhibit."

Next, I heard from Susan Wageman about her memorable visit to the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center (Mashantucket, CT). She reports: "This museum is so good that my parents were willing to drive three hours in the rain to take me there, when they had just been there a few months before. I was very impressed with the visitor flow and the layering of information to appeal to various audiences. Their use of technology, touchable reproductions, and dioramas was very effective and most inspiring. I especially appreciated the multiple ways they approached every subject—what is this, how was this made, and why do we know this. This projected a very powerful message about how our histories are both culturally dependent and limited by historical evidence. WOW!!! It is a message that I would love to see in more museums.

"The way the museum addressed multiple learning styles and interests impressed me most. Although some of the impetus for this may have been their exceptional commitment to disability access, the end result creates better access for all. My mother and I spent maybe an hour going through the life-sized walk-through village diorama area. Afterwards we found that we had experienced it in very different ways—she focused on the 'how to' parts and I spent most of my time with the 'how do we know this' parts. This type of mutual experience provides great opportunities for discussion afterwards."

From Randi Korn I recently learned about the Black Fashion Museum, located in Washington, DC. Lois Alexander-Lane founded the first Black Fashion Museum in New York, as a result of her research on African American retailing, and she later opened the DC branch in 1988. The



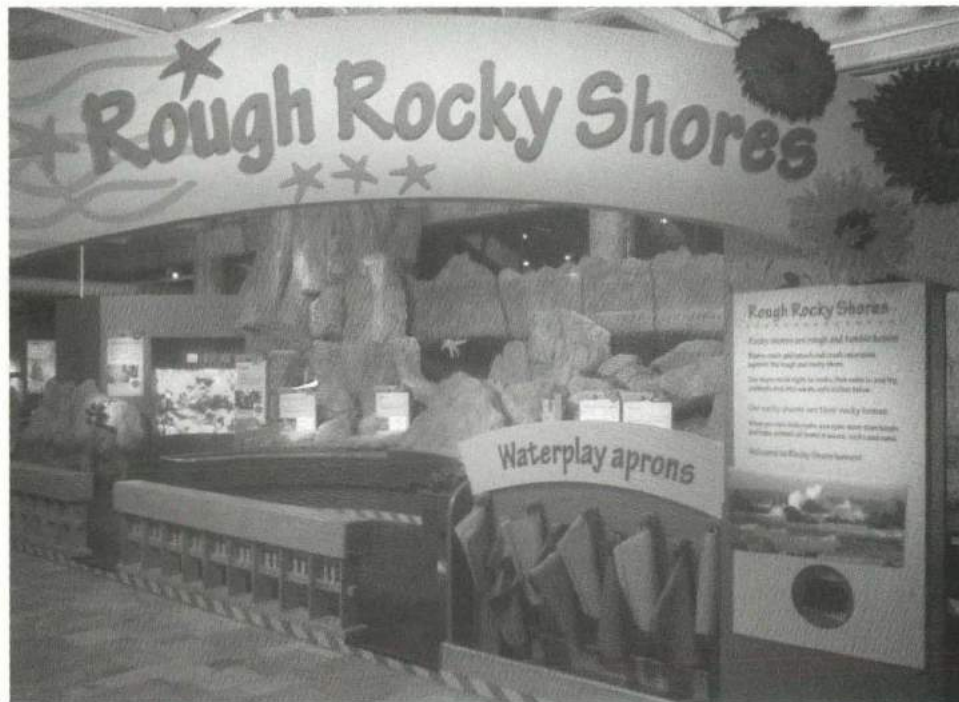
Washington museum preserves 2,000 - 3,000 garments made by black designers, but can only accommodate a handful in its exhibition gallery. Among the museum's most famous dresses are those made by Anne Lowe, the designer who created Jacqueline Bouvier's wedding dress. Recently on display were evening wear from the 1920s; an upcoming show entitled *Lights, Cameras, Costumes* will feature theatrical wear. On permanent exhibition is a thin silk dress made by Rosa Parks, which she was carrying on her famous bus ride. The museum is open by appointment only; call 202-667-0744.

Before moving on to international news, I can't pass up the opportunity to recommend new, good work that I've recently enjoyed in my own hometown. At Chicago's own Museum of Science and Industry, I enjoyed an exhibit with a stunningly to-the-point title, *Time*. The exhibit features over 500 intricate, elaborate, useful and intriguing timepieces from the world-famous collection of Seth G. Atwood. The design treatments are striking and seemed to really play off qualities of the timekeeping instruments themselves—cool, precise, hard surfaces made of highly polished metals, granite and glass. Gobos project section titles on the floor and walls, and some are in motion through the gallery space to animate the primarily static presentation. Each day at noon visitors can gather for demonstrations of several enormous 18th and 19th century automata—giant clocks ornamented with animated scenes of birds, saints and sea battles that come to life thanks to highly mechanized clockworks activated when the hour strikes.

On my own turf, I'm also very proud of the Chicago Historical Society's new exhibit, *Out of the Loop: Neighborhood Voices*. For nearly a decade, our staff has worked in partnership with four Chicago communities to develop exhibits and programs about neighborhood history. This most recent project brought together our partners from all four neighborhoods for a two-year long process of dialogue to identify forces that are driving change—for better or worse—in their communities today. Our staff team took the challenge to create an exhibit based on the powerful but abstract ideas identified through this process—immigration and migration; work and unemployment; urban renewal and gentrification—and to tell the story from the diverse perspectives of our partners. Because the exhibit speaks to the experiences of people living through these controversial issues, there is a directness to the content that we as professional interpreters rarely achieve. A "Neighborhood Voices" video theater is central to the presentation, and encircling it the story is told through

artifacts, interactives and a richly textured soundscape. On opening day it was a joy to watch our community partners proudly guiding museum members, as well as families and friends, through "their" exhibit.

New to Chicago is the Kottemann Gallery of Dentistry at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry, designed to showcase the college's advances in dental techniques. Using artifacts dating back throughout a century, the museum illustrates the evolution of dental practices, from the days of iron pliers to today's modern office with high-speed water-cooled drills; one display features an early X-ray machine, a dangerous device with no provision for containing or directing radiation. Designed primarily to



Children can crawl through, climb on, slide down and pop up in displays as they watch and learn about the animals that call these waters home.

serve an audience of dental students, the museum provides educational materials from root canals to dental implants, including jewel-like examples of tooth restoration. You won't find this gallery on the web, but you can book a group tour by calling 312-996-8495.

I recently enjoyed a visit to the Lake County Discovery Museum, in Wauconda, IL. The museum's motifs are cleverly based on notable local attractions: Gurnee Mills shopping



mall and Great America amusement park. Fully half the museum is devoted to *The Mall of History*, an interactive pathway through northeastern Illinois history, introduced by a multi-screen film placed within a roller coaster setting. Individual “stores” in the mall are devoted to historical topics such as the county’s heritage of utopian settlements; local businesses; ecology and forest preserves; and early film-making. Throughout, visitors can employ a magnetized card to activate moving displays, video programs, and push-button quizzes. The museum’s other half displays an amazing collection of postcards, the Curt Teich Postcard Archives built by the Teich postcard publishing company beginning in the

early part of the 20th century. The collection includes postcards from around the world, and highlights the history of postcard manufacture and the processes of making them. One display that grabbed my attention featured a postcard from the 1940s showing a restaurant. The exhibit included the original photograph, as well as actual samples of the carpeting and woodworking from the site, so that the color retouchers could make accurate matches.

Computer stations invite visitors to explore the full range of the archive,

or to view a selection of postcards from sites along Route 66, or send a virtual postcard from the Teich collection.

Also nearby, I’m planning to make a trip to Milwaukee to visit the brand new William F. Eisner Museum of Advertising and Design. In October, the museum opened with an exhibition called *A New Set of Wheels*, whose objective is to explore the relationship between car design and advertising. Using vintage prints and television commercials, the exhibit provides an historical overview of its subject, starting in the 1920s, when competitive advertising among automobile manufacturers really began in earnest. Imagery on newspapers, magazines and billboards juxtaposed the LaSalle with biplanes and dirigibles to emphasize its identity as a modern means of transport. In the 1930s, as auto designers introduced streamlining based on aerodynamic qualities, advertising design followed suit. But in the World War II era, auto ads featured dramatic battle scenes, to stress the industry’s use of new technology derived from military engineering. In the 1950s, advertising stressed the flash of tail fins and chrome; in the 1960s, cars designed with youth in mind—the Volkswagen Beetle and the Chevrolet Corvair—were promoted with images of couples on a date.

With the comment, “Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction,” Marjorie Schwarzer drew my attention to the Markina City Footwear Museum in Manila, Philippines. The opening was hosted by (can you guess?) former First Lady Imelda

Marcos, the world’s most notorious shoe collector. Seems that Imelda, along with a number of local politicians and film stars, donated hundreds of shoes in hopes the new shoe shrine will boost tourism and help the local footwear industry. Mrs. Marcos stated that the museum was a creative way of turning a negative perception (the 1,200 pairs of shoes she is said to have left behind when she fled the country in 1986) into something positive. Asked how many pairs of shoes she presently owned, she reportedly replied, “I don’t know, I’ve really lost count.”

As faithful readers know, Gene Dillenburg is my partner-in-crime for this endeavor, tirelessly sniffing out new exhibitions for your pleasure. As he was packing to journey north to his new employment in the Twin Cities, Gene passed along a few of his inimitable tips. First, from Mexico, news of the Museo del Narco-Trafico in Culiacan, a city strategically located on a bandit-infested strip of northwestern Mexico’s Pacific coast. The area’s traffic in heroin dates from the Second World War, when it was a prime producer of battlefield analgesics for the U.S. military. Visitors are greeted by an introductory memorial plaque listing the names of 380 troops killed fighting the war on drugs, then pass on to four display rooms that highlight an incredible array of ingenious containers that smugglers have used to carry out their trade. These range from a huge birthday cake, hollowed books, a dried armadillo, a false-bottomed can of Coca-Cola, the sole of a sandal, an ironing board, zoom lenses, a petrol tank, a hollowed pumpkin, and false buttocks and breast implants. Chunks of cocaine are coated in chocolate or with cheese, and one papaya has cocaine where the seeds should be. Finally, there’s a little boy’s cycle that he used to pedal daily across the border, its wheels packed with cocaine.

Almost as incredible in variety are the weapons confiscated from drug lords, including a rocket launcher powerful enough to bring down an airplane, a gold-engraved rifle, an emerald-encrusted pistol, and a home-made shotgun soldered from iron farm implements. But the piece de resistance is a Chevy pickup armed with a device to leave an oil slick on the road, a tear-gas grenade launcher and a lever that will scatter tacks to puncture the tires of any car in pursuit. The museum includes a unique kind of “interactive” exhibit: an altar at the museum is dedicated to Jesus Malverde, the bandit king to whom traffickers pray in hopes he will provide bumper crops of opium poppies or marijuana.

Gene also sent word of a new venture in Washington, DC: “the largest permanent exhibit dedicated to the history of espionage” is to be built downtown by the spring of 2002 by the Malrite Co. Preliminary plans call for immersive experiences to give visitors a sense of time and place; an advisory board of historians and agents from both sides of the Cold War will oversee accuracy. The museum has secured nearly

Using vintage prints and television commercials, the exhibit provides an historical overview of the relationship between car design and advertising.



60,000 square feet at Eighth and F Streets NW, and is now pulling together exhibits from their own and private collections of spy memorabilia, including an original Enigma machine. They also plan a themed restaurant and café, a store, and a role-playing game called "Spy Adventure." Consultant and collector H. Keith Melton says, "The general public really has no idea about real spying. We want to show how the world we live in has been crafted through the work of spies."

Further speaking of Bond, the Museum of Science (London) has created a new exhibit with useful tips to prevent and cure that pain from excessive martini consumption. Giving the imprimatur of authority to some commonly-known cures, the exhibit assures us that consuming plenty of vitamin B6 during and after drinking can reduce the severity of hangover by as much as 50 percent (although nobody knows why); rounding off the night with a sports drink laced with extra sweeteners will replace lost body sugar and eating will slow down the rate at which alcohol is absorbed by your body. Not much new there, but here is one startling fact: "A slightly shrunken brain is a well-known side-effect of drinking," the museum said. They recommend drinking plenty of water to keep that gray matter nice and plump.

Some of you may have heard of this fall's opening of the John Lennon Museum in Yono, Japan. The museum portrays Lennon's life, from his turbulent childhood in Liverpool, to his happy relationship with Yoko Ono. The design of the museum expresses emotional tones corresponding to the storyline. Exhibits on his Lennon's years, concerned with the band's early commercial success, are positioned in narrow, gloomy rooms; video units show screaming fans and are juxtaposed with song lyrics illustrating Lennon's increasing disillusionment with success. A display on the breakup of the band describes his meeting with Yoko Ono as a path to connection with a wider and happier world. Exhibits show Ono's art, and its influence on her husband's life. The final decade of their life together is depicted in a bright, airy gallery featuring family photographs and a piano on which Lennon inscribed a message of love to Ono. The last room is completely white, and features the lyrics from his final album written in English and Japanese on a central, transparent wall.

Looking to the future, an organization called Answers In Genesis recently won regulatory approval to build a museum and headquarters on 47 acres near Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport. Initial plans call for a 95,000-square-foot building to house an alternative to "evolution-dominated" museums. Founder Ken Ham envisions a walk-through history of the world according to the Bible from the Garden of Eden to the tower of Babel. He projects a budget of \$4 million to construct the museum, with an equivalent amount in donated materials and labor.

Dinosaurs figure prominently in plans for the museum. Answers In Genesis has a warehouse full of models and is building more, including a 50-foot Tyrannosaurus Rex. "We're going to have the largest collection of life-sized dinosaur models in America. We have a dinosaur sculptor on staff," Ham said. "Dinosaurs are incredibly popular. Kids are fascinated by them. So are parents. Over and over again in the secular world they are equated with millions of years, they are equated with evolution. And so we want to tell people that dinosaurs are not a mystery; the Bible explains dinosaurs." Ham says that the word dinosaur doesn't appear in the Bible only because the word is of relatively modern origin. He cites the behemoth in Job 40. "I see no reason that could not be a description of a dinosaur," Ham said. "You wouldn't expect to find [dinosaur] in the King James Bible. But you do find the word dragon." Most texts say dinosaurs roamed the Earth during the Mesozoic Era about 65 million to 225 million years ago. Ham says man and animals date only to the generations named in the Bible, covering about 6,000 years.

In our last issue, we started a new feature for this column, a purely-for-fun listing of oddball virtual museums. This time out, I'll pass on two suggestions for armchair museum-going: the Museum of Hoaxes, and its cousin the Kooks Museum. I don't really want to say much that could spoil the impact of your first encounter with the amazing collections of these two museums (and they are both definitely collections-based, albeit in virtuality). Visitors can access the nicely illustrated collections at the Museum of Hoaxes either chronologically (by century, from 1600 to 2001) or typologically (from anthropology hoaxes to zoology hoaxes, with stops along the way for historical hoaxes, legal hoaxes, political hoaxes and television hoaxes, to name just a few). Things are even more complex at the Kooks Museum, where collections are displayed in thematic galleries—Schizophrenic Wing, Conspiracy Corridor, Gallery of the Gods, Solution to the World Problem Exhibit. Underlying all is a dark streak, most evident in the Hall of Hate and the Library of Questionable Scholarship. A lot of serious thought has gone into the construction of this site, and I do suggest taking a look. As Marjorie Schwarzer reminds us, "Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THESE EXHIBITS,
CHECK OUT THEIR WEB SITES BELOW:**

Monterey Bay Aquarium <http://www.mbayaq.org/>

Mashantucket Pequot Museum <http://www.mashantucket.com/>

Museum of Science and Industry <http://www.msichicago.org/>

Chicago Historical Society <http://www.chicagohistory.org>

Lake County Discovery Museum
<http://www.co.lake.il.us/forest/ctpa.htm>

William F. Eisner Museum <http://www.eisnermuseum.org/>

Museum of Science, London <http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/>

Answers in Genesis Creation Museum
<http://www.answersingenesis.org/museum/>

Museum of Hoaxes <http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/what.html>

Kooks Museum <http://www.teleport.com/~dkossy/kooksmus.html>



Excellence in Exhibition

A report to the Board of NAME

by Eugene Dillenberg,
Lynn Friman, and James Sims

Eugene Dillenberg is an Exhibit Developer at The Science Museum of Minnesota. He's been reading poetry for 20 years and developing exhibits for 10, which explains a lot. You can reach him at: dillenburg@earthlink.net

Lynn Friman, a former President of NAME, has spent the past 20 years designing and developing exhibitions.

She has held positions at Tibany Architects, Leone Design Group and the Detroit Historical Museum. She recently left Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village to open her own studio, Envisions Design in Ann Arbor, MI. She may be contacted at: lynnefriman@mediaone.net

James Sims is a member of the faculty in Museum Studies at the George Washington University. Formerly senior designer at the Museum of American History, he is a principal of Threshold Studio, an interpretive planning and design firm in Alexandria, Virginia. He may be contacted at: zibbits@aol.com

In 1999, members of NAME embarked on a strategic planning process to establish a vision of what they want the organization to be in the future. As part of this process, several task forces were formed to consider broad areas of concern within the profession. The following is the report on excellence in exhibition from one such task force.

PREAMBLE

“Excellence” is perhaps the perfect buzzword. It is universally embraced; no one can seriously argue against being excellent. Yet, at the same time, it is so maddeningly hard to define, so profoundly intuitive, that no meaningful measurements exist. Everyone goes merrily about their business-as-usual, paying lip service to “excellence” but rarely making significant strides towards it. There is no clear destination, no road map for getting there, and no one to hold accountable if we never arrive.

This is unacceptable. Museums hold vast and valuable collections in the public trust. We receive tax breaks, government funding and admission income from our constituents. We enjoy tremendous public good will. And exhibit programs consume enormous amounts of resources—not just money, but also the time and professional energy of countless careers. Excellence cannot merely be the stuff of idle daydreams, or an annual exercise in self-congratulation. It must be real, concrete, and the focus of our daily efforts. Exhibits require so much, from us and from our publics, they had better be excellent.

But they're not. Looking out across the profession, we not only find few exhibits worthy of the label “excellent,” but a distressingly large number that fail to achieve even basic competence. Indeed, this emphasis on excellence at times seems misplaced. You cannot run before you walk, and you cannot walk until you learn to stand—and sadly, too many of us are still struggling to find our exhibition “legs.” The profession suffers a critical lack of fundamental skills.

However, skills alone are not enough. There must be a purpose for these skills, a goal we can strive towards. And “excellence” is the name we give to that goal. It is not achievable every time. It is certainly not achievable all at once. But we believe it can be achieved, and it can be defined, in a consistent and measurable way. And once we've established that, then excellence may serve as a sort of beacon, drawing us all towards greater accomplishment.

Defining excellence and making it meaningful to the profession will be a long, involved process. A first step was taken in 1997 when the Council of Standing Professional Committees of the AAM issued its “Standards for Museum Exhibition and Indicators of Excellence.” (see this issue, pages 14-15) This document provided only a rough outline of excellence, particularly as it applies to the creative arts of exhibit design and development. NAME, as representative of the exhibition profession, must assume leadership in fleshing out these ideas and making them useful to exhibit practitioners. This report proposes to be a road map for achieving that goal.

PART I: WHAT IS EXCELLENCE?

“The best is the enemy of the good.” —Voltaire (1694-1778)

“Excellence,” Mr. Webster tells us, is the state of exceeding norms and expectations. So before we can define excellence, we must first define standards. What do we expect of an exhibit?

That's an extraordinarily loaded question. There's no shortage of competing ideas, philosophies and theories. To get the ball rolling we propose the following definition, recognizing that it is by no means “value-free,” but hoping it will be as widely-applicable as possible: *An exhibit is a medium*



of communication. (How it communicates, what, and why are issues we leave for other philosophers.) As such, it works in four broad ways:

Intellectually: Exhibits present information. At the very least, the information needs to be accurate. Moreover, it should also be interesting, relevant, and, if possible, innovative in some way. If well done, an exhibit should make you think.

Physically: Unlike most forms of communication, which we access through one or two senses, an exhibit requires us to use our entire bodies. It presents 3-D objects in a 3-D space, which the visitor can access only by physically moving through. If well done, an exhibit should make you do.

Emotionally: An exhibit seeks to establish a context for its subject: awe, respect, excitement, calm, urgency, anger—whatever is appropriate for its objects and its message. If done well, an exhibit should make you feel.

Holistically: An exhibit addresses these areas, not discretely and sequentially, but all at once and all together. It taps into every piece of you, and makes you activate every part of your humanity. If done well, an exhibit should make you be.

That's a pretty tall order. Small wonder success is so elusive. Clearly we as a profession, or even as individuals, are not going to achieve "excellence" in one fell swoop. Rather, we need to establish steps leading towards this goal to guide us, to chart our progress, and to guard against backsliding.

The guilds of the Middle Ages provide us with a metaphor. One did not achieve excellence in painting, metallurgy, or any other art or craft in a single leap. Rather, one began as an apprentice, learning the essential skills and acquiring basic competence. Then one became a journeyman, applying those skills and demonstrating one's ability. Finally, when all those skills came together and were fueled by individual fire and spirit, one became a master of their chosen discipline.

Similar career stages, with or without formal titles, may help the exhibit profession as well. We must make the museum profession aware that exhibition is a complicated craft, and not something that anyone can walk in off the street (or in from another department) and master instantly. We must establish basic skills, required for basic competence of all practicing professionals; as well as a higher level of master skills, both achievable and measurable, to indicate excellence.

This paper takes a first crack at identifying these skills. We divide them into two broad categories: **PROCESS**, the behind-the-scenes professional work, which lead to **PRODUCT**, the audience experience.

(We have consciously and specifically chosen not to define product excellence in professional terms. While we believe that an excellent process will lead to an excellent product—usually—the purpose of the product is not to showcase our professional mastery. The purpose of the product is to serve the visitors' needs. This can be the only justifiable measure of excellence in an exhibit.)

PROCESS: Professional Protocol

Competence:

- process leads exhibitors through visual/sensory thinking and research
- listens to questions from audience and colleagues
- develops and uses design criteria
- knows and applies the technical standards of applied fields
- identifies necessary resources
- articulates content in visual/physical terms
- synthesizes input from entire organization
- provides evaluative tools (sketches, drafts, etc.); collects and uses feedback
- manages development calendar
- manages production budget
- provides quality control

Excellence:

- invents new meaning through visual/sensory thinking
- creates a place for ongoing public conversation
- leads colleagues to understand and appreciate how design works
- creatively employs standards to further storylines, involve audience, to push the envelope and redefine the field
- finds new technical and intellectual resources
- reshapes understanding through visual/sensory thinking
- design process defines and shapes the content/ the way meaning is structured
- enhances collaboration with audience and between colleagues
- eliminates waste of professional time
- eliminates waste of public money
- assures public support for museums

PRODUCT: Audience Experience

Competence:

- comfortable access
- physical access: it's within reach—you can see and touch
- emotional access: it's within feeling—you can respond to it
- intellectual access: it's within reason—you can understand, it's coherent
- cultural access: it's within our experience—it's from a human point-of-view
- it is accessible to multiple learning styles
- you understand the meaning without words
- you can see and read every word
- you can get safely in and out
- you know what it's about
- you know what's expected of you
- it's a pleasure to spend time here

Excellence:

- you feel compelled to enter the event
- the 4-D relationships underscore meaning
- the emotional impact sharpens understanding
- the content is well-structured, beautiful, moving, elegant, and supported by evidence
- the "why should I care?" is clear throughout
- interpretive elements are integrated into a whole learning experience
- the visual and spatial forms make new meaning
- the text has literary value and impact
- the path itself has meaning
- layers of meaning are revealed if you try
- challenge and skills are equal, making "flow"
- your life is enriched



Each of these entries is shorthand for an important and complex idea. These need to be debated by the profession, fleshed out and defined before they can finally become meaningful signposts on the road to excellence.

PART II: CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

"Baseball is like church. Many attend. Few understand."
Leo Durocher (1905 - 1991)

Our process for defining excellence was not in any way earth-shattering. We simply put words to ideas that are already broad-based and common, if rarely articulated, within the profession, and arranged them under the rather intimidating rubric of "excellence."

But if these ideas are so common, why is excellence so rare? What obstacles stand in our way and prevent us from achieving this lofty goal that everyone insists they want? We have identified a variety of factors, which we group into several broad categories:

Even when these extremes can be avoided, there remains the challenge of balancing individual creativity with the team dynamic.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Institutional

Lack of understanding. There frequently is no clear institutional focus or direction for exhibition. Is it an educational tool? An opportunity to showcase collections? A scholarly dissertation? A marketing strategy? Some, none, or all of the above? And — most important — why? The answers vary from project to project and, all too often, are not even asked.

Lack of value for exhibits as a profession. Curators and educators have permanent, even tenured positions; exhibitors are all too often contract employees on soft project money. Their role is not to be a creative equal, but merely a craftsman hired to realize another's vision.

Lack of exhibit staff, particularly at small institutions. Exhibit work either falls to other staff (who are not trained in exhibition and who may treat it as a low priority), to freelancers (who are not part of the institution's culture), or is not done at all.

Inertia. Some institutions develop a "formula" which worked once and is then rigorously followed until it becomes a hindrance rather than a help.

And—the same old refrain—insufficient resources: not just money, but time and staff, even vision, leadership, and structure, can be seen as resources that are far too scarce.

Team

Much has been written about the team process, not all of it good. While most would agree that exhibits are insanely complicated endeavors, requiring the input of experts in many disciplines, no one as yet has found the perfect formula for creating this collaborative art. The need for team members to speak their minds too often leads to bickering paralysis; the need to avoid bickering paralysis too often leads to team members afraid to speak their minds.

Even when these extremes can be avoided, there remains the challenge of balancing individual creativity with the team dynamic. Compromise is essential, but also frustrating.

Meanwhile, our institutions do not nurture creativity, in individuals or in teams. For all of the new-found infatuation with corporate management theory, we don't encourage risk-taking nor reward entrepreneurship. Such things are unquantifiable, inefficient, and don't fit nicely onto a Gantt chart. But they are indispensable.

Audience

Blaming the customer for a business failure is almost surely an indication that the person failing has precious little business sense. But museum exhibitors do face several challenges with regards to audience.

Everybody likes us. We enjoy tremendous good will and public support. We are largely non-controversial (itself an obstacle, and one few administrators want removed). All we want to do is educate, entertain, and show off cool stuff. We therefore are often judged leniently, in accordance with our intentions rather than on our actual accomplishments.

This perception of museums as inherently good leads to problem number two: lack of critical discernment. When someone goes to the movies, they do not pay eight dollars for the privilege of sitting in a dark room with a bunch of strangers and eating overpriced popcorn; they are paying that money in the hopes of enjoying the film. So they pay attention, and can usually explain what they did or didn't like. But far too many museum-goers pay their seven dollars just for the privilege of going to a museum. Some want to be exposed to "culture," some to "education;" others go out of a sense of civic pride, or civic duty. But the mere act of going is an end to itself; what happens inside is frequently of secondary importance.



A third challenge stems from the common perception of the Museum, with an oh-so-capital-M, as the place where society enshrines its treasures. We are expected to be solemn, serene, stern, elegant, and removed from the run of everyday life. The phrase “museum-quality” connotes not just a level but a type of object, and exhibits are expected to support and reinforce this image. Which makes it awful hard to try something new.

In any event, few visitors have enough content expertise to tell whether the exhibit is achieving its goals, and fewer still have enough museum experience to assess how the exhibit tried to achieve its goals. With no one paying much attention, there's little incentive to strive for excellence.

INTERNAL FACTORS

Judgment

Just as our audience is too often uncritical of us, we are too often uncritical of ourselves. As stated earlier, we lack definitions and benchmarks that define what is standard, let alone what is excellent. We lack critical thinking skills, tools, or even a common vocabulary for discussing these issues. And, not wanting to hurt our colleagues' feelings (or our own chances of getting another job), we are often too easy on ourselves and on each other.

Inexperience

These deficits in critical judgment stem from a lack of standard education and training, both before entering the field and once on-the-job. Meanwhile, major exhibit projects are so long and complicated that it is difficult to amass enough experience to ever say one has mastered the craft.

Isolation

Most communities have few museums. Even in larger cities, institutions are physically separate—the mall or campus is a rarity—and intellectually segregated by subject matter.

Most exhibit departments are small. We have few colleagues on hand to bounce ideas off of. This problem can be especially acute for freelancers, who do much of their work alone in home offices or studios.

With tight schedules and limited resources, few of us have the luxury of spending time on the museum floor, with the audience, and seeing how our work is actually used, to see what works and what doesn't.

Within the profession, we have few opportunities to network, to discuss ideas, to ask for help. With tiny travel budgets, we don't even get out to see each other's work often enough. As such, we lack a sense of a profession, a common purpose and culture.

Fear

Without knowledge, experience, or fraternity, we become paralyzed by fear. No one likes to fail. We especially don't like to fail in public, on a large scale, in a permanent medium. We really, really don't like to fail when we have no job security. And since neither we nor our institutions are knowledgeable in what works or what is possible, we are predisposed to always make the safe move, or no move at all, rather than to try something new.

Just as
our audience is too often uncritical
of us,
We are too
often uncritical of ourselves.

Difficulty

Let's not forget—exhibition is hard. Integrating content and design, sorting out the trivial from the essential, incorporating the input of a dozen different specialties: this is difficult, complicated work. It takes years to complete a single large project. On a journey of a million steps it is easy to lose your way, to forget where you're going, and it's certainly impossible not to stumble now and again. And let's not kid ourselves—there is no magic bullet. Even if we were to sweep away all obstacles in our path, exhibit professionals are still faced with an extremely complicated, difficult job.

PART III: OPPORTUNITIES

"It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine."
R.E.M., 1989

The items in the previous section were for the most part what we consider “Obstacles”—limits imposed upon us from the outside, and which, if we cannot change them, we must work around. In this section, however, we list items that might be considered “Challenges”—limits set from the inside, environments which we can work within to find new ways to achieve our goals.

Intellectual integrity and identity

A rising chorus of voices—in conference presentations, in professional articles, even in casual conversations—insists that “In an increasingly superficial and artificial (or virtual) world, museums can position themselves as purveyors of the authentic and the profound.” Cut through the buzz words and it boils down to this: museums are important because we've got real stuff, and we've got real scholarship to back it up. And both of these have value—a value which is not always fully appreciated, but which is beginning to get some notice,



both within the profession and outside. Can we take that notice and do something with it?

There is competition
to nurture
creativity,
to reward
creativity,
to own
creativity.

Perhaps. But we must define ourselves first. What is it about exhibits that people value? We must recognize and establish our core values, strengths, and competencies before we can fully exploit them.

Bottom-line focus

We all know the story. Government funding is down; private philanthropy has not taken up the slack; museums must become more business-like, find other sources of earned income, etc. The profession is in upheaval, rethinking what it means to operate in the public trust when it requires such large sums of non-public money to do so. As historic alliances among governments,

communities, non-governmental organizations, corporations, and capital come apart and are rearranged, we can insert our vision for exhibitions—for public meaning making—in the new, emerging power structures.

Our best strategy is to evolve in a way that takes advantage of this environment. Instead of bemoaning the end of our old, comfortable world, the time has come to find ways to adapt to our new reality. Everyone is abuzz with talk of “the experience economy.” Well, exhibits are the key component of the museum experience. We’re in the spotlight, which is nice. But we must also seize this opportunity to educate the new business-focused managers coming in from other fields as to what an exhibit is, what it does, why it exists, how it works.

This is an opportunity for us to learn from them (how to create a brand identity, a niche, a market position for our institutions). Just as importantly, it is an opportunity for them to learn from us (what is an exhibit, anyway). Educating the rest of the institution would be a nice side-effect. And we

need to do it on our own terms—since we are the resident experts—rather than allowing someone else to define us.

New exhibit themes

Museums are beginning to mount exhibits on biodiversity, cultural diversity, etc. These are fresh, uncharted territory. The paradigms of stuffed animals, mannequins, paintings on white walls—all problematic, all developed before exhibition emerged as a separate profession—needn’t hold sway in these brave, new worlds. Also, there does seem to be growing public interest, if not in the buzz words, then at least in concepts like environment and ethnicity. So we have the opportunity to make the scientific foundation of these complex, still-emerging ideas widely accessible.

The same can be said for new exhibits on existing themes. More and more the call goes up for multi-disciplinary content; multiple voices; accommodation for diverse learning styles; making exhibits relevant and connected to visitor’s lives; to explain the value of



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museums. The exhibit platform is the chosen medium for fulfilling numerous agendas. This puts us in a position of power, if we can only figure out how to use it.

Even after twenty or thirty years of creating the interpretive exhibition, we are still making it up as we go along. And that's a good thing. We know, or should know, as a profession that we have only just begun this innovative phase of cultural invention. We can't rest on what we have done because there will be more and better next year, next decade. This not-knowing-how-to-do-it is a tremendous opportunity for exhibit-makers to explore new forms.

The iron is hot. There is competition to nurture creativity, to reward creativity, to own creativity.

Technology

Lots of people grab this one first. It's hot: connectivity; interactivity; data storage and retrieval. These all can enhance an exhibit. Technology is a tool for accessing visitors with different learning styles. It also offers great opportunities to do a lot of cool new things that simply are not possible any other way (think Sounds from the Vault as a primo, successful example). The dual challenges are to A) discover what those cool possibilities are, and B) use them properly and effectively, and not just as bells and whistles.

A second great opportunity of new technology is its potential to teach us, the museum communicators, how to communicate better. The Web—rapidly becoming as ubiquitous and familiar as the telephone or TV—is another non-linear information delivery system. How does it work? What language has it evolved? What ideas can we steal from it? What can it steal from us—to make Web sites more like exhibits?

Good will

One of the challenges to excellence we defined earlier was that people like us too much; they uncritically approve of whatever we do, and so don't challenge us to do better. On the other hand, this tremendous good will also afford us a certain cover. Our forgiving audience isn't going to abandon us over a few well-intentioned mistakes. This should embolden us to try new things.

PART IV: WHAT NAME CAN DO

*"A man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?"*
Robert Browning (1812-1889)

And now, at long last, we arrive at the bottom line: what can NAME as an organization do to promote excellence in particular exhibitions? Of course, before we could make any useful suggestions, we had to first define what excellence is, and identify the obstacles and opportunities that affect our attempts to achieve it.

And that work is not quite done. While this task force has certainly enjoyed debating exhibit philosophy, we recognize the need to broaden the discussion to include more voices, more points of view. The gap between theory and practice is wide enough that we felt it would be inappropriate to close off debate at this juncture.

Rather than make a lot of specific recommendations, we felt the organization would be better served if we suggested some larger areas which NAME can work in, and then open up the conversation. Perhaps there are better ideas out there. Perhaps there is disagreement on the basic principles that brought us to this point. In any event, deciding on the particulars will certainly require input from the field.

At the end of the day, our goal
is not to impose excellence,
but to promote critical thinking skills.

So, we return to the Process / Product dichotomy which was so helpful in defining excellence in the first place, and suggest some NAME activities in each sphere:

IDENTIFY EXCELLENCE (THE PRODUCT)

Definition

- continuing and enlarging the discussion
- producing "Excellence in Exhibition" booklet

Recognition

- rethinking Awards program
- expanding exhibit review and criticism
- developing "Excellent Exhibits We Have Seen" guidebook

PROMOTE EXCELLENCE (THE PROCESS)

Advancing the Profession

- outreach to non-exhibit museum professionals
- incorporating Excellence-in-Exhibition into MAP or other accreditation

Professional Enrichment

- developing new approaches for training exhibit professionals
- training for students and new professionals

At the end of the day, our goal is not to impose excellence, but to promote critical thinking skills. It's all well and good to define excellence, award it, and try to emulate it—but these efforts will be of little use if we don't understand it. We must cultivate our capacity, not simply to know what is excellent, but why it is so. Only then can we infuse our projects, our institutions, and our profession with the requisite "resonance and wonder" that are the hallmark of excellence.



Standards for Museum Exhibitions and Indicators of Excellence

*Developed by the Standing
Professional Committees
Council of the American
Association of Museums*

INTRODUCTION

Exhibitions are the public face of museums. The effective presentation of collections and information in exhibitions is an activity unique to museums, and it is through their exhibitions that the vast majority of people know museums.

Museum exhibitions are complex, and even modest ones require the time, energy, and expertise of many people. Museums now realize that effective planning, management of resources, research and interpretation, collections care, marketing, merchandising, design and fabrication, public programs, publications, and fund raising all contribute to the fulfillment of a museum's mission. However, it is vital that we as a profession not lose sight of the importance of the exhibition in its own right.

STANDARDS FOR MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

An exhibition is successful if it is physically, intellectually, and emotionally engaging to those who experience it. What follows is an outline of exhibition features that generally result in success. A competent exhibit need not demonstrate all of these features. The outline should be viewed as suggestive rather than precisely prescriptive. In fact, there is little that can be—or should be—prescriptive about good exhibition design. We should always allow for purposeful—and often brilliant—deviation from the norm.

The following standards for museum exhibitions are organized in six major categories followed by descriptions of what constitutes effectiveness for each category and a listing of specific ways the category might be expressed in an exhibition.

1. Audience awareness

Did the audience respond well to the exhibition, and was the response consistent with the exhibition's goals?

Some specific ways this standard is achieved and demonstrated are:

There is convincing evidence that the exhibition achieved its purpose(s) for its intended audiences and/or there is convincing evidence that the exhibition surpassed its intended goal(s) and resulted in unanticipated, positive experiences for visitors. Decisions about content, means of expression, and design are based on decisions about the intended audience. Visitors are given information in a variety of formats to accommodate various needs and preferences. If not, why not? The exhibition is designed to accommodate those who wish to skim as well as those who wish to take more time. If not, why not?

2. Content

Does the exhibition respect the integrity of its content?

Some specific ways this standard is achieved and demonstrated are:

Subject is appropriate to an exhibition format, with its use of collections, environments, phenomena, and other means of physical presentation of content. Significant ideas, based on appropriate authority, are clearly expressed through reference to objects in the exhibition. The content reflects current knowledge of the subject. The subject is of current interest or the exhibition contributes to creating interest in a subject of importance. There is a sufficient number of objects to present the subject of the exhibition.



3. Collections

Have conservation and security matters been appropriately addressed?

Some specific ways this standard is achieved and demonstrated are:

Objects are mounted appropriately. The requirements of good conservation (light levels, climate control) and security are met.

4. Interpretation/Communication

Is the information/message of the exhibition clear and coherent? If not, is there a good reason why not?

Some specific ways this standard is achieved and demonstrated are:

The exhibition title communicates the subject and sounds appealing. There is a clear idea or set of ideas expressed, and those ideas are clear to viewers. There is a discernible pattern to the way content is presented, and if not, there is a good reason why not. There are coherent, easy-to-follow, and consistent formats for presenting information and eliciting responses, and if not, there is a good reason why not. Assumptions and points-of-view are clearly identified. If appropriate to the subject matter, the exhibition need not provide definitive answers. Raising questions and providing a forum for ideas may suffice. Specific topics and individual objects are treated in a manner appropriate to their importance. Interpretive media (labels, lighting, interactives, video, etc.) are appropriate to the exhibition's goals, content, and intended audiences. The exhibition is engaging. Efforts are made to make the subject matter come alive through attractive presentation and opportunities for establishing personal connections and meaning.

5. Design and production

Are the media employed and the means used to present them in spatial planning, design, and physical presentation appropriate to the exhibition's theme, subject matter, collection, and audiences?

Some specific ways this standard is achieved and demonstrated are:

Design elements (i.e. color, lights graphic treatments, exhibit furniture) contribute to and support the exhibition's ideas and tone. Orientation at the start and throughout the exhibition provides visitors with a conceptual, physical, and affective overview of the exhibition. Spatial organization supports the exhibition's organization. Traffic patterns are obvious to visitors and support the exhibition's sequencing of information and experiences. If not, there is a good reason why not. For each element of the exhibition (furnishings, audio-visuals, sound, printed materials, graphics), the materials used and the quality of production are appropriate to the design concept, audiences, duration, and budget of the exhibition.

6. Ergonomics: human comfort, safety, and accessibility

Is the exhibition physically accessible? Are visitors comfortable and safe while viewing the exhibition?

Some specific ways this standard is achieved and demonstrated are:

If the exhibition includes any potentially troubling material, visitors are forewarned so they can make informed decisions about whether they want to see it. Instructions are given when needed; they are clear and easy to understand. There is seating, as appropriate. Labels are engaging, informative, legible, and easily understood. The exhibition is fully accessible to all its visitors, and the needs of all potential visitors are addressed.

INDICATORS OF EXCELLENCE IN MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

While many exhibitions achieve a competent level of professionalism, each year there are a few exhibitions that achieve excellence by surpassing standards of practice in scholarship, interpretation, and/or design or by introducing innovations that stretch the boundaries of accepted practice. Such exhibitions are highly distinguished and serve as models of the capacity of museum exhibitions to provide transforming experiences visitors so often attribute to them.

Some specific indicators of exhibition excellence are:

An aspect of the exhibition is innovative. The exhibition offers a new perspective or new insight on a topic. The exhibition presents new information. The exhibition synthesizes and presents existing knowledge and/or collection materials in a provocative way. The exhibition includes innovative uses of media, materials, and other design elements. The exhibition is particularly beautiful, exceptionally capable of engendering a personal, emotional response, and/or profoundly memorable in a constructive way. The exhibition evokes responses from viewers that are evidence of a transforming experience. Such experiences are often characterized in these ways: It was haunting. The exhibition was an absolute eye-opener. I'll never see XXX in the same way again. I was filled with excitement. It knocked my socks off. It sent shivers down my spine. I finally got it!



A Tool for Judging Excellence in Museum Exhibitions

by Beverly Serrell and
the Excellent Judges

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Special thanks to Gene for help
with inspiration, editing,
and logistics.*

A new tool is under
development for use by museum
practitioners to judge the
excellence of an exhibition.

Introduction

What do we mean when we talk about excellence in exhibitions? Can excellence be measured or even defined? If you ask nine museum professionals to describe excellence will you get eighteen different answers? From July through November 2000, a group of museum professionals met in Chicago to discuss these questions and other topics related to judging excellence in exhibitions. Inspired by a lively meeting of the Chicago Museum Exhibitors Group in June, we formed a subgroup of about fifteen people, including exhibit developers, designers, and evaluators to pursue the topic more intensively. Over a series of meetings, e-mail discussions, and visits to eight local exhibitions, we developed a prototype instrument for judging excellence in museum exhibitions. At this stage, our tool is still a work-in-progress and is neither statistically valid nor reliable. But it provides an excellent starting point for focused, provocative, productive discussions among museum practitioners about the art, science, and culture of making exhibitions and for thinking about their impact on viewers.

We want to share our tool with other museum professionals who might form other study groups and use it to review and discuss exhibitions in their own communities. We hope that by sharing it at this point we can get feedback on how others use it and how it might be modified to help all of us think more clearly and deeply about exhibitions.

General Principles and Constraints

In developing this tool we have been informed and inspired by other sources and types of criticism in the museum field, such as the AAM's "Standards for Museum Exhibitions," the critiquing sessions at the AAM annual meetings, NAME Newsletter discussions, and other articles. In this article, we will describe, define, and distinguish this tool from other methods and show how we've used it so far.

What is it?

This prototype "Tool for Judging Excellence in Museum Exhibitions" is one method of rating the degree to which, and the ways in which, an exhibition has achieved excellence. This tool strives to take the visitor's experience as its perspective. It uses five criteria—Comfort, Competence, Engagement, Meaningfulness, and Satisfaction—that emphasize impact; that is, the visitor's reactions to what the exhibition presents rather than the museum's intent for the presentation. It's not a replacement for other forms of judging excellence, and it's not a tool for giving prizes for the best or worst exhibitions. It's not a substitute for doing visitor studies, and it shouldn't stand alone as the only method used to review an exhibition. Rather it is a way to help us discuss exhibitions with a common and consistent means of comparison. It's a tool for encouraging peer group critical analysis of exhibitions from the receiver's point of view.

Why has this tool been developed? What's it for?

There are currently no widely accepted or clearly articulated standards for excellence in museum exhibition that take a public perspective. We respect, appreciate and have used the AAM's "Standards and Indicators" to develop this tool, but our purpose is not to give professional awards. Our tool, for now, is a springboard or catalyst for thought.



How is it different from exhibit evaluation, critiques, exhibition reviews, or the AAM standards for the Annual Award of Excellence?

Evaluation, by our definition, relies on systematically collected feedback from visitors. Standard practices of evaluation are well known and learnable (i.e., not personal or idiosyncratic). Evaluation is often (although certainly not always) goal related; that is, evaluation looks for evidence that the exhibition's objectives were met and defines success in those terms. Evaluation usually compares visitor feedback about the exhibition to the exhibit developer's intentions and objectives. The main basis for saying an exhibition is "good" is to find out what the exhibition was supposed to do and then see whether it was doing it (Shettel 1994).

Critiques, as we have known them at AAM sessions for the last 11 years, are the opinions of informed professionals, given their training, experience and personal biases. Critiques are not intended to be objective, but, depending on the critic, their opinions may be informed by and compared with a broad range of knowledge of the field. Criticism is analysis and consists of value judgments measured against the "doctrinal allegiance" of the critic (Chambers 1999).

Exhibition reviews vary widely. They may sound more objective or subjective depending on the author. The reviewer's intent is often not clearly stated, and his or her qualifications may not include museum practice in visitor studies, exhibition development, or scholarship in the subject matter. The intentions of the exhibit developers are often a main focus. In a guide for writing reviews, Phyllis Rabineau includes the suggestion to phone the people most directly responsible for the exhibition and ask them questions about their agendas, intentions, and constraints (Rabineau 1994). In a review of reviews, Paulette McManus points out that they typically contain excessive praise, ignore or lightly skim over exhibition faults, ignore accountability to claimed communication goals, and employ descriptive rather than analytical methods, and, therefore, fail to offer information that can be helpful for improving museum practices (McManus 1986).

The AAM "Standards for Museum Exhibitions and Indicators of Excellence" were developed in 1997 by three standing professional committees of AAM (CARE, NAME, and CurCom, with help and input from other SPCs) to be used as guidelines for judging the entries in the annual exhibition competition. Application forms and materials (e.g., label text, photographs of displays, walk-through videos) are submitted to three judges, each a representative of one committee, who discuss their choices and pick the winner(s) jointly at a meeting. The AAM Standards include many important concerns that are not available as part of the normal, unguided, public experience of going to the exhibition, such as the exhibition's budget, conservation and mounting techniques, security measures, special educational

programming, or the process of the exhibition's creation. The perspective of the AAM's criteria is mainly on presentation and intent (e.g., content, collections, design, meeting goals and objectives), rather than impact and visitors' reactions.

Who will use it?

Our tool is for museum practitioners (staff, volunteers, consultants) who have experience with visitor studies and exhibition development, either through reading or by hands-on practice. For those who have forgotten or never knew how to think like visitors, its time to learn and get in touch with your inner visitors' voice before using these criteria. (There are two excellent bibliographies that can guide museum practitioners to the best resources for visitor studies information. See Chandler Screven's 1999 "Visitor Studies Bibliography and Abstracts" and the Web site for the Museum Learning Collaborative.)

We recommend that it be used to facilitate discussions among museum curators, designers, developers, educators and evaluators before judging an exhibition and afterwards to compare ratings by different individuals. We have found that these before-and-after discussions are more interesting and useful than the raw number scores. A minimum group size of six judges makes a diverse and productive experience. While diversity of the players is important, so is the preparation of learning the shared vocabulary of the criteria the tool promotes.

Where will it be used? What will it exclude?

This tool is to be used in a museum exhibition during public hours while other visitors are in the space. The tool is used to judge what we can see, do, learn, feel, and otherwise experience in the exhibition's environment. Like food critics, we go unannounced; we don't go into the kitchen, we eat with the other customers. We judge the meal by what we find on the plate, how it's served, how delicious it was, not by what the cook was trying to make.

While this tool is meant to be applied broadly, it is not universally applicable. It is designed for use in public museums with educational, interpretive exhibitions. Interpretive exhibits are places where learning experiences are encouraged and meant to be more than just fun. "Interpretation embraces a discussion of human values, conflicts, ideas, tragedies, achievements, ambiguities, and triumphs" (NPS 1997). It will work with large or small, temporary or permanent exhibitions designed primarily for adults, in groups with or without children, who are not specialists in the topic. It will not work in exhibits aimed specifically for young children (under the age of 6 or 7) or infants, although it will work in exhibitions meant for family audiences that include all ages. It's not meant for trade show exhibits.

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How does it work?

Each of the five criteria has an initial value of 20 points. That is, we start each criterion with 20 points, assuming the exhibition is excellent in that area. If a criterion was met, no points are deducted. In addition to a numeric value, the judging should include brief comments by the judge about his/her views of the exhibition's strengths or lack thereof in regard to the criteria. If a criterion has been met and exceeded, 1 to 5 points can be added as extra credit. "It was amazing!" "I loved it." "Fantastic experience."

If a criterion has not been met—

- Knock off 1 to 5 points for minor infringements or insufficiencies that distract from an excellence experience. "It was really good, but not perfect." "Some minor distractions, but nothing serious." A score of 15 to 19 for a criterion is good, satisfactory, maybe even close to excellent.
- Knock off more points (6-10) for glaring omissions or errors. "Worth a visit, but not exceptional." "Has some problems." A score of 10 to 14 is all right, OK, but not great.
- Deduct 11 or more for major failures or flagrant disregard (with no suitable and/or apparent motive) to meet the criteria. "Lots of things about it that were disappointing and distracting." Scores of zero to 9 indicate inherently serious problems that prevent an excellent experience.
- Don't take off points for the same infringement under more than one criterion (an effect we call a "double whammy").

The total points are added up for all five criteria. Then the total is divided by the number for a perfect score, in this case 100, to give a fraction or decimal figure. (This is so that if the number of criteria change in the future, we can still compare relative values.) An exhibition that meets all the criteria has a

score of 1.0 and is excellent by virtue of that! An exhibition that exceeds a score of 1.0 is excellent indeed. An exhibition that does not meet some of the criteria will have a score of less than 1.0 (a fraction, e.g., 0.85, 0.77, 0.45). An exhibition that fails to meet most of the criteria may still contain some evidence of excellence.

How has it worked so far in Chicago? What were some of the results?

In our reviews of eight different exhibitions in Chicago, our scores varied widely in some cases and were closely related in others. For example, eight judges reviewed "The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition" at Field Museum in November 2000. They rated it as follows: 1.12, 1.10, .97, .91, .91, .87, .78, and .63. Five judges clearly found "The Endurance" a compelling, well-presented story told with amazing photographs and primary-source journal quotations, rating it in the .90s or higher. The person who rated it lowest found it unengaging and thought the British "voice" was dry. (He also admitted that he had little interest in stories of exploration, especially those concerning the poles.) The judge who gave it a .78 had her visit spoiled by a verbally intrusive guard. One judge, who had read the book of the same name by the exhibition's curator (Caroline Alexander) thought the exhibits did not convey adequately the feelings of the men as chronicled in her book. Almost all of the judges took points off for Field's cramped and confusing layout. This diversity of opinions reflects the nature of criticism and how it is influenced by personal, idiosyncratic vantage points even when the judges used the same set of criteria. Whether the criteria can be honed to the point that there will be greater agreement on what exactly the criteria are meant to measure remains to be seen.

Tool for Judging Excellence of Museum Exhibitions: Five Criteria from a Visitor-Experience Perspective

20 points each for Comfort, Competence, Engagement, Meaningfulness, and Satisfaction. The order reflects, to an extent, the sequence of the exhibition experience. There is some overlap, and the last one builds on the previous ones.

COMFORT—In an excellent exhibition, visitors feel comfortable—psychically and physically. Comfort covers a broad range of issues related to accessibility. Good comfort opens the doors to other positive experiences. Lack of comfort prevents them.

Issues include: Inclusion, pluralism, authority, "voice," attribution, accountability, orientation, wayfinding, ambiance, quality of execution, durability, intuitiveness.

Questions, statements, and what visitors might say:

- Do people of different cultural background, economic class and education feel welcome in the exhibition?

"I see myself in this exhibition. It's about something I have in common with other people."

"It looks like something I can relate to."

"The museum guards were unobtrusive, pleasant and friendly."

- Can visitors tell who is talking to them? Has the authorship been identified or attributed? Would they know how or where to follow-up with more information?
"I understand the point of view here, even though I might not agree with it."
- Do visitors have a sense of the scale and scope of the exhibit at the start?
"I could budget my time at a glance, because I could tell how big it was."
- Can you find your way into and through the exhibit easily?
"I didn't get lost." "I didn't lose my kids."
"I knew where to start, where to go, and what my options were."



Where do we go from here?

When we first sat down together in July 2000, I acted as the facilitator and convened meetings and attempted to direct the discussion. We didn't know exactly where we were going with the topic of judging excellence or what to call ourselves. At times our discussions veered off in many directions at once. At one point, I asked everyone to use three different sets of criteria to judge one exhibition and report back on which one worked the best. Instead they came back with five more tools! It felt like herding cats.

By the end of September 2000, we had narrowed our focus to criteria that related only to the visitor's experience and began arguing about how to use it rather than what the criteria should be. By eliminating judgments about the quality of the design and accuracy or importance of the content and not attempting to judge intent, we made our task manageable and leveled the playing field: we were all visitors. We would judge exhibitions by how it felt to be in them, not what they said about themselves in a review, or in a binder of PR materials or showed in colorful slides. In all we met nine times and visited eight different exhibitions, and by the end of November had honed the five criteria you see here. It was unarguably an intellectually exhilarating experience for all.

In the next phase of the Chicago Excellent Judges discussion group—hopefully with some funding (intellectual stimulation is good; so is cash for hours of work)—we will continue to refine and define the criteria. We will also ask and investigate the research question of how the tool can be made statistically reliable and valid. That is: If different museum professionals use the same set of standards to visit and review the same group of exhibitions, would their reviews agree on the degree of excellence for each of the exhibitions? And, if not, why?

If and when the answer to the question above is yes, then we will have the makings of a tool that could be widely shared to review and compare exhibitions and identify excellence in a more objective way than critiques and reviews have done so far in the past. The long-term goal is to improve the quality of visitors' experiences in and satisfaction with museum exhibitions by providing tested standards for exhibit developers.

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"An answer to 'What are the Curators Committee Awards For?'" *Curator* 36(2): 86-88.

- There were convenient places to sit down; the lighting, temperature, and sound levels were appropriate.
"I was not distracted by too much 'buzz'."
"My bifocals worked just fine; I could read and hear without straining."
"Grandma could sit down and still see what was going on."
- Everything works and is in good repair.
"I didn't waste my time trying to use an interactive that was broken."
"The instructions were almost intuitive."
"Nothing made me feel frustrated."

Questions, statements and what visitors might say:

- They were not overwhelmed (although they may have been challenged).
"I don't have to come back three times to see everything, although I certainly want to come back again."
- Visitors feel stimulated emotionally and intellectually, not numb, bored or anxious.
"It's not over my head. It was not meant for someone who is smarter than me and/or for someone who has more time than I do."
"My sense of competence was sustained throughout the exhibition."
"The interactive exhibits were interesting, not just a gimmick."
- The exhibits speaks to them.
"The labels were not preachy, pedantic, too long, or too cute and chatty."
- The seamless design has no distractions or inconsistencies and does not call attention to itself.

COMPETENCE—In an excellent exhibition, visitors feel intellectually competent. Competence is a cognitive comfort that goes beyond accessibility.

Issues: "Flow," levels of understanding, vocabulary, label content, visual content, density, juxtaposition, reinforcement, redundancy, integrity



"I wasn't confused or distracted by the 'layering.' It made sense."
 "It all held together so well."
 "I 'got' it."

ENGAGEMENT—An excellent exhibition is engaging for visitors. Engagement is largely an observable quality—what are people are doing?

Issues: Time spent, number of stops at elements, appropriateness of behaviors, social interaction, pacing, "energy," diverse modalities

Satisfaction in the
 the **cumulative gestalt** of the whole visit;
 the **feelings** you walk away with.

Questions, statements and what visitors might say:

- Do visitors seem to spend time and/or make lots of stops? They don't bolt for the exit door.
 "I was hungry and tired, but I couldn't pull my self away."
 "I was in a state of flow—I lost my sense of time."
- Do they read labels, read out loud to others in their social group? Do they call each other over; point, and talk with each other about the exhibit material? Are people alone moved to make comments to strangers?
 "Come over here! Look at this!"
 "Isn't this amazing?"
 "Over there it said..."
- Do visitors seem engaged emotionally?
 "I laughed, I cried..."
- Engaging experiences are come in a variety of formats in a variety of sensory modes—visual, auditory, textual, motion, touch, etc.
 "There were lots of different things to do."
 "I liked the videos, and the interactives were really fun."
 "I always wanted to (see, touch, hear, etc.) a real one."

MEANINGFULNESS—An excellent exhibition is personally meaningful to visitors. Beyond being engaged, visitors find themselves involved in immediate and long-lasting ways.

Issues: Relevance, affect, constructivism, expectations, connections, cognition, inspiration, reflection, universal human concerns, soulfulness

Questions, statements and what visitors might say:

- Are the objects of the exhibit (natural specimens, living collections, cultural artifacts, demonstrations and activities) and ideas relevant to the visitors? Can visitors find personal connections?

"It answered my questions, 'so what?' and 'why should I care?'"

"I've seen and learned things related to this before."

"It took me beyond what I already knew."

- Are they engaged cognitively? Did they learn something new, or make a new connection? Can they easily complete these sentences:

"I never knew..." "I didn't realize..." "It reminded me..."

"What if...?"

"I'm ready to explore further."

- Meaningful experiences are often constructed from encounters with the same information in a variety of formats.

"What I learned in one place in the exhibition was reinforced in others."

- Meaningful exhibitions don't shy away from deep or controversial issues. It's more than fun facts or boring, safe, or uncontroversial topics.

"There were real ideas here; not just information."

"Lots of ideas were raised; it made me think and didn't give all the answers."

"It didn't ignore any issues I know are important." "I didn't feel bamboozled."

- The experience changes them; they are moved to new actions, beliefs.

"It blew my socks off."

SATISFACTION—An excellent exhibition is a satisfying experience for visitors. This is the cumulative gestalt of the whole visit, influenced by factors that came before; the feelings you walk away with.

Issues: Fulfillment, surprise, lasting impressions, personal recommendations, revisit, purchases, perceived value

Questions, statements and what visitors might say:

- Visitors feel satisfied because their expectations have been fulfilled, or, if it wasn't what they expected, they were pleasantly surprised.
 "It was different that I expected, but I was not disappointed."
 "It was much better than I thought it would be."
- Did the visitors like the exhibit?
 "I'm coming back." "I'll tell my friends about it."
 "I bought the catalog and a souvenir." "It was tight!"
- Was it a worthwhile social and leisure activity?
 "We had a really good time doing things together."
 "I learned a lot."
 "It was worth the price of admission, and more."



Just Add Water: Essential Elements to Make A Traveling Exhibition

by Frederica R. Adelman

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*The author wishes to express
her thanks to her colleagues at
SITES, in particular Head
Registrar Lee Williams and
Assistant Director of Exhibits
Laurie May Trippett.*

Special issues arise in
striving for excellence in
traveling exhibitions.

Years ago a colleague suggested the perfect SITES traveling exhibition: a small, inexpensive, lightweight package to which the exhibitor would just add water. Up would pop an object-rich, popular, timely exhibition replete with extensive programming opportunities. Would that we could!

Imagine that someone somewhere has devised such a template for designing traveling exhibitions. It would include precise formulas to calculate the ratio of square footage to subject matter and provide exact crate measurements (both weight and dimensions). Added together these factors would provide an optimum number of venues able to afford the carefully-figured rental fee. Staffing, research time and creative effort would also be assigned precise coefficients to yield consistent, popular and profitable traveling exhibitions...

But the truth is that the work of making a traveling exhibition is essentially the same imprecise, serendipitous, emotion-laden creative process as the work to make temporary and permanent exhibitions. Object selection and research, storytelling, design, fabrication and prototyping are familiar to all exhibition developers. What is fundamentally different is the overriding conceptual framework: no element can be included if it has not been scrutinized for its "travelability." Yes, those of us who travel exhibitions have coined some inelegant insider phrases and "travelability" is one of my all time favorites because it forces us to ask so many key questions: Is the lender willing to part with a prized collection piece for an extended period of time? Is the object stable enough to withstand handling at a variety of locations by many different people? And once on display, are there limitations (such as sensitivity to light or other environmental factors) that would make a particular piece less than travel-worthy? And, on a more macroscopic level, is the topic one that will be of interest to a wide-ranging national audience?

At the same time as the exhibition developer is determining the "travelability" of the topic and collections, other equally complicated elements are factored into the equation: What fee can client museums afford? Will the fees cover the costs of design and production? If not, is there a benevolent sponsor who can readily make up the difference? Does the timeliness of a topic work in its favor or will today's cutting edge work be yesterday's news by the time it gets to tomorrow's exhibitor?

From a pure design standpoint, the exhibition developer is both liberated and hampered by the same fact: traveling exhibitions are designed for a variety of configurations. The same rules apply ("cheap, fast, good - pick two," for example) and in some instances must be more strictly enforced (the back of the panel has to look as good as the front, because you never know how the show will be configured). Space requirements are broadly outlined (running feet necessary for displaying the flat work, square footage required to install the cases and other 3-D elements) because the exact layout of each space is unknown. One venue may house a traveling exhibition in a highly adaptable 'black box' gallery, while another may showcase traveling exhibitions in an L-shaped gallery and yet a third accommodates touring exhibitions in rooms on multiple levels.

On the other hand, architectural impediments such as pillars or window walls or oddly-shaped galleries that may plague designers in their own museums do not exist for us. Our concerns lie instead with limiting factors common to all host museums, such as minimum ceiling heights, the width of standard freight elevator doors and the inability to anchor anything into the floor.



Furthermore, materials selected for traveling exhibition components must be esthetically pleasing, durable, lightweight, not harmful to objects, and easy to maintain. Devices that connect exhibition elements must be straightforward and installation should be uncomplicated and not require excessive specialized equipment or staff power. All locked cases, for example, should be keyed to the same key.

Once the research has been completed, the story sketched out and objects identified and accepted (not too fragile, not too big, not too beloved of the owner), we begin the task of designing the framework so that it will fit in a multitude of spaces. Simultaneously, we plan for how the objects will be presented: mounted permanently so that no one need have special training to handle them? Or, carefully measured for

brackets and cavities in crates so they can be packed and mounted into vitrines at each venue. Will the cost of shipping those vitrines drive up shipping and therefore should exhibitors provide their own? Or, are the objects limited in such a way that cases must travel? And if so, we must take extra precautions with the cases, outfitting them with silica gel to create microclimates with stable humidity conditions. Each of these possibilities is weighed against the reality factors of budget, conservation requirements of the work and a careful review of facilities reports submitted by venues.

The back of the panel has to look
as good as the front, because
you never
know how the
show will be
configured.

Design proposals for a traveling exhibition may include cubic volume of a truck as well as square footage of a gallery so that shipping costs do not become excessive. This particular exercise is not straightforward, as it pushes the designer to think not only about the look and feel of the finished product, but also its heft and how it can be broken down into component parts. Not to mention that we strive for universally accessible, clever, elegant and up-to-the-minute design solutions.

SITES exhibitions fit a variety of museums and exhibition spaces. They run the gamut from small (500 square feet) modular exhibitions that can be handled and put together like a puzzle by two volunteers, to large (6,500 square feet) complicated, object-intensive interactive exhibitions requiring a trained and experienced installation crew (including at least one and sometimes two of our own staff registrars). Just recently, we have started to offer exhibitions that fit in one 4'x5'x3' crate, exhibitions comprising a single kiosk, and exhibitions that travel in trucks that visitors can walk through (a museum on wheels, as it were). Although an increasing number of spaces boast 10,000 or 20,000

square foot temporary exhibition galleries, meeting that demand is a much more daunting challenge.

Because each exhibition is unique, each suggests a different design solution. In most instances, a customized design plan is most effective for presenting material. Exhibitions are not trade shows. When a museum invests in a temporary exhibition the expectation from the board and staff is that it will draw positive press attention, attract visitors, have a lasting effect on the community and bring kudos to the museum. Although SITES has on occasion made use of "off-the-shelf" or "cookie-cutter" systems, we usually find ourselves customizing them to suit the particularities of the exhibition in development.

When planning to take an exhibition on the road, it is critical to learn as much as possible about the potential venues. Facilities reports provide an important snapshot of the museum and its capabilities, but information about mission, audience, allocation of funds (for temporary exhibitions, say, in context of funds allocated for programs or a building campaign) and role in the community are equally valuable, although far more intangible. Exhibitions that appeal to a narrow population, are overly expensive or do not give the local host ample opportunity to tout their own talents are less successful than exhibitions of popular interest, that leave room for the hometown story and are reasonably priced for the target venues.

One final note of caution. In general, the profit margin in the traveling exhibition business is not huge. For every high ticket sale, moneymaking mini-museum shop blockbuster there are at least a dozen others that went over-budget, proved less popular than expected, or were irreparably damaged. Sometimes we score and sometimes we tank, but that is not what this industry is about. It is about bringing exciting collections and scholarship directly to the people who are thirsting for them. If anything, it is the incredible museum partners and their enthusiastic visitors who are the "water" that bring traveling exhibitions to life.

SUGGESTED READING:

Glasgow, Vaughn

(no date) "AASLH Technical Report No. 10: Planning a Traveling Exhibition." American Association for State and Local History.

Tyler, Barbara and Victoria Dickenson

1977 *A Handbook for the Traveling Exhibitionist*. Canadian Museums Association.

Witteborg, Lothar P.

1991 *Good Show: A Practical Guide for Temporary Exhibitions*. (2nd edition) Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service.

AAM ANNUAL MEETING AND MUSEUMEXPO
St. Louis, Missouri, May 6-10, 2001

Spirit of community

Sunday, May 6

12:00 - 5:00 p.m.

NAME Executive Board Meeting

12:30 - 4:30 p.m.

NAME Exhibit Development Roundtable

Join Paul Martin and Janet Kamien for this once-a-year get-together to talk about the hottest topics in exhibition design and development. Whether you are just starting out in the field, or you have been working in the business so long you can't remember life before exhibitions, you should attend this discussion.

6:30-10:30 p.m.

Picnic in St. Louis

Start the Conference with a picnic! Join NAME for an evening at Cummel's Cafe and the Washington University Des Lee Gallery. There will be food for the body, art for the soul, and music for your feet. Make sure to bring your check book, so you can participate in NAME's first annual fundraising auction!

NAME Sponsored Sessions

Monday, May 7

10:30 - 11:45 a.m.

Getting Started: Involving Your Community in Exhibit Development

Chair: Eugene Dillenburg, Exhibit Developer, Science Museum of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN

Okay, you've decided your next exhibit needs community involvement to really make it work. Now where do you start? Exhibit professionals from four different backgrounds and institutions will provide nuts-and-bolts advice on how to form community advisory panels for exhibit development work; what pitfalls to watch out for; what kinds of community input you can request and expect; and how to keep the community involved through the length of the project. We'll discuss how to focus energy into a productive process that results in a wonderful exhibit and community experience.

Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Curators Committee, the AAM Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation, and the AAM Public Relations and Marketing Committee.

3:30 - 5:30 p.m.

NAME Marketplace of Ideas

The AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME) Marketplace will feature trends, design solutions, and recommended production "bests" culled from exhibitions around the country. This year, ideas from the Midwest will be highlighted. If you have anything to do with exhibition implementation, you'll need to drop in.

Tuesday, May 8

9:00 - 11:45 a.m.

National Museums and Indigenous Peoples: Perspectives from Two Hemispheres

Chair: W. Richard West, Director, National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC.

The last few years have witnessed the creation of many national museums devoted entirely or in part to the nation's indigenous peoples. National museums are powerful agents in the national discussion about indigenous people in settler societies. Session panelists have played key roles in the development of several new national museums. From the perspectives of their different disciplines and cultures, they will discuss new models for creating exhibits by and about indigenous populations and the role of exhibits in the nation-building discourse on these populations. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Diversity Coalition and AAM/ICOM.*

Against All Odds: Exhibitions on a Shoestring Budget

Chair: Anne von Stuelpnagel, Director of Exhibitions, Bruce Museum of Arts and Sciences, Greenwich, CT

Most American museums are defined as small or very small and operate on an annual budget of less than \$350,000, usually with a staff of five or fewer. But do their permanent or temporary exhibitions have to reflect their finite financial means? Producing substantive, meaningful, functional, and visually exciting exhibitions in these institutions requires setting priorities and making the best decisions with very limited resources while keeping long-range goals in mind. This session addresses creative solutions to these common challenges. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Small Museum Administrators Committee and the AAM Registrars Committee.*

10:30 - 11:45 a.m.

Exhibit Conservation Made Practical: A New Set of Conservation Guidelines

Chair: Toby Raphael, Museum Conservator, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry, WV

This program will take a look at the critical issues surrounding the use and preservation of collections. The museum exhibition is where the conflicting responsibilities of cultural institutions collide, the obligation to not only preserve collections but to use them. Dialogue and interdisciplinary communication will be examined from the perspectives of the designer, conservator, and management. The key to a successful exhibit is that it fulfills its educational intent, offers aesthetically engaging material, and conscientiously protects the objects on display. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Curators Committee and the AAM Registrars Committee.*

12:00 - 1:30

NAME Issues Luncheon

Join fellow colleagues for a lively discussion as Rich Faron, Assistant Director, DuPage Children's Museum, explores the "Cutting Edge of Business as Usual."

1:45 - 4:30 p.m.

Welcoming Diversity: Seeing Visitors with Disabilities in a New Light

Chair: Mary Brady, Director, Integral Design, LLC, Baltimore, MD

This double session of two panels includes exhibit designers, visitor services professionals, and Universal Design specialists. Panelists will focus on positive responses to the challenges of creating effective solutions to issues raised by policies of inclusion. Panelists will highlight visitor orientation, museum and exhibit design, and way-finding strategies as they discuss leading edge-strategies and share experiences in designing environments and exhibits that appeal to and accommodate a broad range of museum audiences in diverse environments. They will talk about what really works in applying the principles of Universal Design to museums, and they will challenge participants to rethink their definitions of community. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Professional Training, the AAM Diversity Coalition, the AAM Education Committee, the AAM Media & Technology Committee, and the AAM Public Relations and Marketing Committee.*

The Game of Authors: Who Plays? Who Says? Who Stays?

Chair: James Sims, Professorial Lecturer, Museum Studies Program, George Washington University, Washington, DC
Authority and authenticity are often linked in meaning; they have the same root. The authentic is authorized—by someone. In our contemporary landscape of the experience economy, where random-access, free-choice learning is chic and ideas bend to the latest buyer, exhibitions too often seem to have no point, no point of view, and no authority. Three experienced exhibition authors, from different, practical perspectives, will confront the most urgent issues they face: navigating through institutional decision-making; finding space for individual authority; and maintaining a fresh voice for the audience to see, hear, and feel. This session will illuminate the practical value of intellectual entrepreneurship and risk-taking in exhibition-making and encourage administrators to sustain these values in their institutions. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME).*

3:15 - 4:30 p.m.

Exhibition Excellence: The 13th Annual Exhibition Competition

Chair: David Carr, Associate Professor, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC
The annual awards presentation for the best entries in museum exhibition design is always popular. Excellence and innovation are showcased in a session that will enlighten and entertain. Panelists include designers, curators, and educators. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation and the AAM Curators Committee.*

The Implications of Visitor Meaning Making for Practice in Exhibition Development

Chair: Jay Rounds, E. Desmond Lee Professor of Museum Studies, University of Missouri-St.Louis, St. Louis, MO
Recent theory argues that when visitors experience an exhibit, their activity is directed toward the construction of meaning rather than the acquisition of information. Where does that leave us, the people who create exhibits? Does recognition of this critical approach of visitors devalue our own work? Does it lead to any clear prescriptions for practice? What should we do differently? This session will present a critique of the theory and a challenge to proponents of meaning making to confront issues of practice, followed by a response from the panel of theorist/practitioners. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Curators Committee, the AAM Education Committee, the AAM Committee on Museum Professional Training, and the Association of Youth Museums.*

Wednesday, May 9

9:00 - 10:15 a.m.

How Sacred is Your Cow? How Do You Preserve the Past and Change at the Same Time?

Chair: Willard Whitson, Director of Exhibits, The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA
Many museums are confronting sacred-cow issues. Planners often face a dilemma when evaluating a landmark facility or a beloved institutional icon. A major natural history museum once held focus groups prior to a renovation of its dinosaur galleries. When asked what they liked best about the existing exhibits, the participants responded that they "look like they did when I was a kid." When asked what they liked least about them, the answer was the same. Is it possible to be vital, relevant, and modern while respecting institutional, cultural, and community traditions? Three panelists will approach the topic from an architectural, programmatic, and administrative perspective. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Museum Management Committee.*

2:00 - 3:15 p.m.

On the Bitter Warmth of a Platypus Rug: Exhibiting Nature and Human Nature

Chair: Liza Stearns, Education Specialist, Olmstead, Longfellow and Kennedy National Historic Sites, National Park Service, Brookline, MA
This session examines new ways that museums are interpreting the natural environment by focusing on the interplay of natural and cultural histories. This interpretive strategy moving beyond a mere ecological approach and placing natural history within the broader context of human experience is one way that museums are challenging traditional notions of natural history, environmental literacy and stewardship, and a sense of attachment to the environment. This session will look at the philosophies and methods by which some museums have integrated the scientific analysis of natural history with analysis of cultural and social dimensions. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by AAM/ICOM.*

2:00 - 3:15 p.m.

Enhancing the Museum-Consultant Relationship: How Museums Can Be Good Clients

Chair: Claudia Oakes, Assistant Director for Operations, Utah Museum of Natural History, Salt Lake City, UT
Museums often turn to consultants for a variety of projects, but many museum professionals may not know how to prepare for this partnership. If a museum does not delineate the project's mission and expected outcome and successfully communicate this to the consultant, the museum may be disappointed with the results. Museums often blame the consultant rather than realizing or admitting that they were bad clients. This session will focus on how museums and consultants can function in a real partnership to achieve the best possible outcome for the project. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Development and Membership Committee, the AAM Curators Committee, the AAM Museum Management Committee, the AAM Committee on Museum Professional Training, and the AAM Public Relations and Marketing Committee.*

2:00 - 4:45 p.m.

Critiquing Museum Exhibitions XII: Interpreting Community

Chair: James Sims, Professorial Lecturer, Museum Studies Program, George Washington University, Washington, DC
In this double session we will consider new work at the Missouri Historical Society (MHS). "Seeking St. Louis" is a work of interpretive art and science about a place, its meanings, and the values of its people. It is a built landscape—a metaphor and document of the city landscape beyond the walls. In our critical response we will contrast the work of the MHS exhibition team with another examination of St. Louis beyond the walls—the Missouri Botanical Garden. At the first session, members of the exhibition team will present their institutional mission, specific assignment, and process for realizing their vision. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Professional Training and the AAM Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation.*

Thursday, May 10

7:30 - 8:30 a.m.

NAME Breakfast Business Meeting

Join NAME at our annual business meeting. We will be unveiling our strategic plan for the future. NAME Board members will be present to welcome new members and answer questions.

8:45 - 10:00 a.m.

Environmentally Friendly Designs for Museums and Exhibitions: Making Green a Primary Color

Chair: Mindy Cameron, Principal, Lehrman Cameron Studio, Seattle, WA
The audience will hear anecdotal and detailed descriptions from exhibition designers who have designed and built exhibitions in an environmentally friendly way. Panelists will share their successes and frustrations. The audience will have a chance to hear these professionals critique a current exhibition in St. Louis and will leave with lists of resources. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation and the Association of Youth Museums.*

10:15 - 11:30 a.m.

What's Going On III: A Conversation on Hot Issues in Exhibit Development

Chair: Paul Martin, Director of Exhibit Development, Science Museum of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN
This is a town-meeting-style session that will engage the audience in dialogue about exhibit development issues such as the spirit of community. This session is an opportunity for anyone affected by the exhibit development process to express views and hear what other people in the field have to say. To frame the discussion, we'll use the hottest issues identified in the pre-conference Exhibit Development Roundtable. Topics in the past have included institutional paralysis, the exhibit process, and the use of new technologies. *Sponsored by the AAM Committee on Museum Exhibition (NAME). Cosponsored by the AAM Media & Technology Committee.*

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A Sense of Place: Employing Place-making in Exhibition Design

by John Chiodo

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Specific elements of design can create a sense of place for visitors within an exhibition.

Introduction

Fourteen years ago when I made a career shift from architecture into exhibition design I reorganized my thinking about design in order to address the many interpretive issues that impact exhibition design. This article seeks to address what is involved in crafting exhibit environments that speak to people in a coherent and eloquent way, and how to elevate the shaping of space into the making of a memorable place.

This article is a checklist of things to think about when designing human-made or even natural environments for exhibitions. These thoughts and suggestions describe the many implications of exhibition *place-making* in an exhibition setting.

Throughout this article I will use the term *place-making* rather than *environmental design*. It is my belief that a successful exhibition offers visitors a unique, memorable, and meaningful sense of a special place. The term *place* speaks to qualities that transcend notions of a *space* that is filled with objects. All of us carry around memories of special places we have visited. This article is about the qualities such places have in common and how to purposefully craft exhibitions with similar qualities.

The appropriate and skillful use of place-making in exhibitions is a powerful means for exhibitors to connect to their audience.

Overview

This article is organized into six questions

1. In what ways does the exhibition environment provide opportunities for exhibitors to connect with their audience?
2. What is the significance of the shape of the space between the objects we place in an exhibition plan?
3. Are there language-like patterns that human beings recognize in the environment? If so do these patterns exhibit an identifiable syntax that we as exhibitors can learn to master?
4. What interpretive goals can exhibition environments best advance? To what purposeful ends can we as exhibitors employ exhibition *place-making*?
5. What physical factors or modes can we as exhibitors manipulate to help advance those goals? What are the measurable dimensions or modes of the physical environment and how can we vary them to create the specific expression we desire?
6. How does *place-making* aid the visitor in constructing meaning out of their visit? How does the use of exhibition *place-making* help visitors make connections and integrate their new experience with memory?

Usefulness

1. *In what ways does the exhibition environment provide opportunities for exhibitors to connect to their audience?*

Whether we as exhibitors elect to create specific thematic settings for an exhibition or simply display objects within a given space, we are fashioning a place that visitors will come and occupy for a time. (The term occupancy implies something active and useful to the visitor. It is a temporary taking of possession or a making of one's own.) The sum of the qualities and characteristics of this place will support, detract, or be neutral to the goals of the exhibition itself. The appropriate and skillful use of



place-making in exhibitions is a powerful means for exhibitors to connect to their audience in a variety of ways. We can:

- Communicate with our audience more effectively by employing the physical environment of an exhibition as a vehicle to deliver information to the visitor in an evocative and visceral way that doesn't require conscious processing of verbal information.
- Provide more memorable experiences by affecting all our visitors' senses, resonating with their previous experiences of other times, places and events, and triggering emotional reactions.
- Offer additional opportunities for our visitors to construct meaning through the above potential to communicate and be memorable. Furthermore there is something innately purposeful about experiencing a setting that has a true sense of place.

Figure Ground Relationships

2. *What is the significance of the shape of the space between the objects we place in an exhibition plan?*

It is not just the architectural elements we create but the space we define using these elements that comprises the entire field of experience for the visitor. We must remember that in addition to filling spaces with objects we are also defining space. In so called *figure/ground* relationships the *figure* is seen as the shape that is meaningful and the ground as the background that is left over. If addressed as positive space or *figure* in the *figure/ground* relationship seen in floor plans, the empty space within an exhibition itself can be a powerful tool of communication and evocation.

In "The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems," J.J. Gibson (in Bloomer and Moore 1977) speculates about a sixth human sense, or the "haptic" sense, "which refers to all those aspects of sensual detection which involve physical contact both inside and outside the body." Individuals' projection of this sense enables them to sense specific characteristics of the spatial volumes they are occupying. As designers we can "speak" to this sense and communicate to our visitors by paying close attention to the shape, size and character of all the spaces we create within an exhibition. To do this we must understand how we orient ourselves within space and how mood and behavior are affected by it in order to craft places that are coherent and meaningful to the visitor.

For instance, Charles Moore (1977), the architect, describes how "at the very beginning of our individual lives we measure and order our world out of our own bodies: the world opens up in front of us and closes behind." For instance, humans orient themselves in a something of Cartesian grid, e.g. left-right, front-back, up-down. Partly for this reason diagonals cutting across orthogonal space

feel dynamic and create a sense of tension. If designers ignore the logic of our orientation system we run the risk of designing less meaningful spaces or worse, potentially confusing the visitor, unless it is our goal to do so. By not properly addressing "exhibition space" we are surrendering an opportunity for the visitor to extract something meaningful from it.

Morphology

3. *Are there language-like patterns in the physical environment that human beings recognize? If so, do these patterns exhibit an identifiable syntax that we can learn to master?*

Studies in environmental psychology suggest that there is a morphology (language-like patterns) to the environment that governs the way human beings apprehend and understand any setting they are occupying. This is partly due to the way human sensory apparatus works and partly due to millions of years of evolutionary experience with the natural environment. If a designer ignores these patterns either by a lack of sensibility or by intention they can compromise the coherence and legibility of the setting that they have created. To successfully employ *place-making* in an exhibition the designer must have an understanding, appreciation and command of the intrinsic syntax that humans use to decode their perceptions about the environment they are occupying.

Below are associated groups of patterns that give form and structure to a possible "environmental language". While much of this may seem like common sense it still needs to be explicitly understood and deliberately applied to avoid sending the visitor mixed or garbled messages. The examples are simple for the sake of clarity; nevertheless these patterns can manifest themselves in sophisticated ways.

– Patterns of Use

The meaning associated with how an object or feature of the physical environment is used. The physical characteristics of an object will communicate how it can be used. The many shapes a particular form takes will have different meanings. Think of a seat. The primary need it satisfies is for a place to sit down; however the different shapes it may take will imply different meanings. A formal dining room chair has the same basic form as an overstuffed armchair; they communicate the same use, but the differences in their shapes suggest a different meaning in the way we might use them.

– Patterns of Habitation and Occupancy

The physical expression of a setting that supports specific uses can vary widely depending upon the characteristic patterns of habitation that occur there. The physical environment can set broad limits on the human phenomena that can occur in a given setting.



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extract something meaningful from it.



"Character Sketches in Memorial Hall and the Annex." *Frank Leslie's Historical Register*, 144.

Can you imagine trying to convince a visitor that your partial recreation of a historic room is cozy when it is four feet wide, fifteen feet long, twelve feet high and shaped like a boomerang?

– Patterns Within a Vernacular

These are evolved regional models based upon local resources, climate and culture that govern indigenous ways of building. This pattern reflects the many characteristic features that are consistently applied to furniture and structures in a particular region or locale. This is a basic authenticity issue. Visitors today are sophisticated enough to sense a fake Mongolian yurt when they get into one. It is worth getting it right.

– Patterns of Structure

These are the sensible ways that structures are assembled. This pattern addresses the specific configuration of an

assembly that responds to the force of gravity and the joining of materials. A structural assembly whether real or simulated should be a response to specific loading situations given the strength of a specific material and how it can be shaped. What are we communicating to visitors when the fake beam we installed in our log cabin is so slender that it bends under its own weight?

– Patterns of Archetypes

These are specific configurations of the environment that seem to have a consistent meaning to a large group of people. A front porch may be an example of a North American archetype. The patterns of archetypes in the physical environment deserve much more attention than there is room for here; therefore I suggest Christopher Alexander's *The Timeless Way of Building and A Pattern Language*. For now imagine Carl Jung as an architect.



– Qualities of Materials

These are the characteristic qualities in strength, texture, and value system of particular materials. Materials speak volumes. We associate memories and stereotypes to them. We attach value systems to certain materials. We have immediate responses to the physical and visual characteristics of materials. What are we communicating when a visitor bumps into a hollow sounding column that is supposed to be from a two thousand year old Greek temple?

Environments establish context and communicate the when, where and what of particular events.

Advancing Communication Goals

4. What interpretive goals can exhibition place-making best advance?

Exhibit developers often organize their communication goals around cognitive, affective and behavioral goals. Exhibit architecture can be employed to advance all three of these goals:

– Cognitive

Exhibition environments can convey portions of educational content. Environments establish context and communicate the when, where and what of particular events. *Place-making* can help orient the visitor by providing clues and cues for assimilating the new “reality” (time and place) of the exhibition setting.

– Affective

The character of the physical environment can elicit particular emotional responses. The employment of *place-making* has the capacity to establish mood and activate memories and associations connected to specific feelings.

– Behavioral

Features of the physical environment can prompt particular behaviors within the exhibit setting, such as how to negotiate through and interact with a particular exhibit setting. The employment of *place-making* has the capacity to communicate ideas about use and elicit socially learned behavioral norms.

Modes of Expression

5. What physical factors or modes can we manipulate to help advance these interpretive goals: establish context, evoke feelings and elicit behavior?

Below are listed seven physical factors or modes of expression. To make use of the full potential of *place-*

making in an exhibition setting a designer must master the relationships between the following physical factors and the impact those factors can have on the message we are conveying to the visitors. Effective use of these physical factors can reveal meaning to the visitor at many different levels.

– **Thematic Character**—Communicates a particular time, place, and value system to the visitor.

- Shape & style
- Selection of materials
- Method of assembly
- Level of craftsmanship
- Condition: Distressing materials: demonstrate age, level of care

– **Scale and Proportion**—Draws attention to certain relationships and establishing hierarchy of exhibition elements. Scale can manifest itself as size relative to:

- The whole
- Usual size
- Other parts
- Human size

– **Physical Configuration**—Determines what visitors will experience at different locations throughout the exhibition and the rough order they will experience it. Opportunities for choreographing the visitor experience lies largely with the manipulation of these physical factors.

- Placement and proximity in relation to other elements and the whole
- Orientation and relationship with other elements and the whole
- Order and sequence among the other elements
- View channels and vistas, what can be seen from varying positions along the visitor path

– **Ordering Devices**—Establishes hierarchy. An ordering system can also serve as a background that can be used as a foil. We can create a sense of balance or imbalance by how we apply an ordering system. This is one way we can create a range of formal to informal or static to dynamic conditions. Some spatial ordering systems that can be employed are:

- Organic
- Cartesian
- Radial
- Branching
- Symmetry
- Patterned
- Chaotic

– **Lighting** - Creates moods and activates memories and associations connected to specific places, times of day and the feelings associated with them.

- Intensity
- Spread
- Direction
- Color
- Continuity
- Shape
- Movement



– **Acoustics** - Creates moods and activates memories and associations connected to specific places, times of day and the feelings associated with them. Hollow, dead, lively, soft, intimate, etc.

- Volume
- Reverberation
- Localization
- Tone
- Continuity
- Form

– **Rendering Style** - Expresses condition and enhances visitor participation by triggering the visitors' imagination to "fill in the blanks" from their own experience.

- realistic—impressionistic
- literal—abstract
- new—distressed

Summary—Making Connections—Making Meaning
6. How does place-making aid the visitor in constructing meaning out of their visit?

The effective use of exhibition *place-making* can offer a powerful way to link new content to visitors' previous experiences. It is a universal form of non-verbal communication. Its use can help visitors relate new experiences within the exhibition to pre-existing life experiences. Therein lies the potential for visitors to connect and integrate with their previous experiences.

As a species there is probably nothing that we are cognitively better equipped to do than make sense out of our physical environment. I would venture that apprehending and responding to specific settings in the environment taps a deep sense of purpose for most people since it is a fundamental process of our existence. Whether this provides a portal for visitors to construct something meaningful out of more explicit exhibition content I can't say—but it certainly seems likely.

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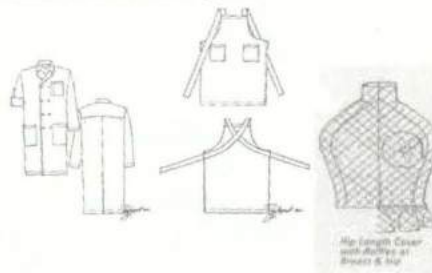
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Exhibiting Indians: Communities, Collaboration and Control

by Craig Howe

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Museums must collaborate with tribal communities for exhibits to convey a true tribal perspective.

It is tantalizing to speculate that collaborative projects involving museums and Indians have their roots on Parnassus Heights in San Francisco. It was there, during the late night hours of Labor Day, 1911, that the Museum of Anthropology welcomed a middle-aged Indian named Ishi who would become its quintessential community consultant. Only six days earlier Ishi had walked into the white world at Oroville, California, a small town 127 miles as the crow flies northeast of San Francisco. Believed to be the last living person of his tribe, Ishi moved into the Museum of Anthropology—literally—where he served as a resident cultural informant until he passed on to the next world in an emptied exhibit room around noon on March 25th, 1916.

It oftentimes seems that this is the collaborative model that museums seek to emulate today. At the core of this model is the relationship between a museum and an Indian individual who acts as an interpreter or a mediator between the museum and the culture of that individual's tribe. In current terminology, this individual is a consultant. Such consultants are paid to provide museums with "insider" information pertaining to the culture of their biological tribal communities. The consultations are usually conducted at the museums and are structured by a contractual relationship that fulfills the museums' desire to elicit Indian voices during the process of developing exhibitions while at the same time maintaining their institutional control over that process.

The presence and participation of paid Indian consultants in museums differs from the collaborative process of developing community-based exhibitions that colleagues and I have been developing for a number of years. This collaborative model is based on a process of working with tribal communities—as opposed to Indian individuals—to create exhibitions that embody an indigenous tribal perspective. Such a perspective minimally comprises four dimensions. The *spatial* dimension of tribalism encompasses an understanding that tribal peoples and their lands are intimately interconnected and conceptually inseparable. Tribalism's *social* dimension relates land and identity to the concept of "peoplehood," a unique community identity differentiated from other tribes and from individual Indian persons.

The relationships between tribal communities and their lands are guided by the *spiritual* dimension of tribalism. These community-specific spiritual instructions embody the moral and ethical standards by which tribal members conduct their interactions not only with the land but also with each other and with outsiders. Lastly, the *experiential* dimension recognizes that tribal communities are perpetuating ongoing relationships with their higher spiritual powers today and will do so for the foreseeable future. Tribalism thus includes spatial, social, spiritual, and experiential dimensions that must be incorporated into exhibitions that aspire to achieve an indigenous tribal perspective.

This collaborative model is based on a process of working with tribal communities, as opposed to Indian individuals, to create exhibitions that embody an indigenous tribal perspective.

Developing a process of collaborating with tribal communities entails a commitment to conceive exhibitions on guiding principles grounded in tribalism. In developing the three inaugural



exhibitions at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), therefore, we articulated five guiding principles that informed their conceptual development: community, locality, vitality, viewpoint, and voice. Each principle was paired with an assertive statement and, since their function was to guide the conceptual development of the exhibitions, was also operationalized within an exhibition context.

Community: Our tribes are sovereign nations. Stress that Native rights and issues are community-based, and that tribal communities possess unique rights and inherent powers. Focus on Native nations that are indigenous to the Western Hemisphere.

Locality: This is Indian land. Show the interrelationship between geographical landscape, spiritual tradition and community identity. Focus on particular places and their inextricable relationships to indigenous spiritual traditions of the Western Hemisphere.

Vitality: We are here now. Present Native cultures as living cultures that continue through time and space. Focus on continuities within Native communities today.

Viewpoint: We know the world differently. Develop interpretations from interdisciplinary viewpoints, but with indigenous worldviews always central. Focus on Native philosophical systems, the distinct worldview of each and the Native languages that transmit this information.

Voice: These are our stories. Include stories from multiple and divergent perspectives, but with Native voices always central. Focus on Native individuals and their personal stories.

These five hierarchically-arranged principles provided a shared philosophical foundation for the conceptual development of the three inaugural exhibitions. It is instructive to note that the first four—community, locality, vitality, and viewpoint—embodied the four dimensions of tribalism—social, spatial, experiential, and spiritual, respectively—and therefore grounded the exhibitions in an indigenous tribal perspective. The fifth principle, which is the stated goal of many mainstream exhibitions, has its roots in individualism. This suggests that exhibitions that focus on presenting “the Native voice” are still struggling to conceive of Indians from an indigenous tribal perspective.

With the guiding principles clearly articulated, we next formulated a common organizational concept for the exhibitions that established separate spheres within which the NMAI and the collaborating communities controlled content. It comprised five components: an introduction, hemispheric commonalities, tribal galleries, linkage nodes between the commonalities and two or more tribal galleries, and a conclusion. The tribal galleries component was the

most important conceptually and also in terms of assigned floor area. Collaborating communities controlled the content of this component whereas the content of the other four components was controlled by the NMAI.

A unique concept was then developed for each of the exhibitions that established parameters for selecting and grouping appropriate communities to be presented in their tribal galleries. The tribal histories exhibition, for instance, focuses on six particular geographic places from across the Western Hemisphere, each linked to two tribal history galleries. Any community whose remembered past includes one of those places is eligible to have their tribal history presented in one of the two galleries linked to that remembered place, regardless of where its community members now live. The exhibition concept also established the structure of the tribal histories. They are comprised of 8 to 12 important events that living tribal members or their ancestors experienced. These events temporally span from when tribal members first appeared on this earth and could extend all the way to an omega event at the end of time. The choice of events rests with the communities themselves, but the intent is that the meaning of the chosen events transcend their temporal and spatial occurrence. In other words, they are epitomizing events that crystallize their community's values and beliefs or in some fundamental way shape who they are as a community.

Based on a complex calculus of hemispheric location, museum collections, and staff expertise, the museum selected from the list of eligible tribes a short list of communities for the 12 tribal history galleries. For each selected tribe, the museum conducted background research on tribal history, developed a preliminary list of epitomizing events, compiled a tribal bibliography and an inventory of museum resources from and about the tribe, and identified an academic scholar. The academic scholar was someone who had conducted extensive research pertaining to the history of that tribe, knew the location and general holdings of repositories with tribal materials, and had personal contact with tribal members. The academic scholar would review the materials the museum produced and nominate a number of tribal liaison candidates for the tribal history gallery. A viable tribal liaison candidate was a tribal member who lived in the community, spoke both the tribal language and English, was knowledgeable of community protocol, and was comfortable taking on a leadership role in developing the tribal history gallery. A tribal liaison serves as the museum's primary contact in each community and works closely with museum staff all the way to opening day and beyond.

With the philosophical and conceptual framework of the tribal histories exhibition clearly articulated, a workshop was convened during which this framework, and the methodology outlined below was vetted by a select group of



"big thinkers" from outside the museum. The four invited individuals were highly respected by their peers in the field of Indian history and had demonstrated a capacity to think beyond the box. Collectively, they were Indian and non-Indian; they were widely published, highly educated, and had extensive experience living and working in tribal communities. They supported the exhibition as conceived, so it was then vetted within the NMAI by the museum's senior management group and an invited senior curator from another of the Smithsonian's museums. Though individuals and even departments disagreed to varying degrees on certain aspects of the exhibition, it was and remains essential that the NMAI as an institution at least tacitly commit to its philosophical and conceptual framework before initiating the following collaborative methodology. It is a processual model; the actual methodology of working with tribal communities was tailored to each situation.

The initiation of formal contact between the head authorities of the museum and a collaborating community sets in motion a five-phase iterative process that constitutes the core of the collaborative model. Important meetings between tribal and museum representatives differentiate the five phases and represent moments of decision making and work review. These meetings punctuate the extensive and ongoing community fieldwork and documentary research that goes into developing each of the tribal history galleries. The location of these meetings alternates between the two partners; the first, third, and fifth are in the community, the second and fourth are at the museum.

In phase one, museum staff travels to the tribal community, and in a public meeting, organized by the tribal liaison, presents the philosophy and concepts of the exhibition and invites the community to participate in the process of creating their own history gallery. It is critical that the event-centered concept of organizing the 12 tribal histories in the exhibition is clearly articulated at this meeting and that everyone participating concedes to work within its dictates. Equally important is that the methodology of developing and presenting the tribal history is explained. Subsequent to the meeting, a small number of tribal members are selected to serve as community representatives throughout the developmental process. These individuals, along with the tribal liaison, are primarily responsible for finalizing their community's epitomizing events and for selecting the objects, photographs and other media through which the events are presented. They also assist in obtaining accounts of those events from knowledgeable tribal members. These representatives, along with the tribal liaison, travel to the museum for the phase two meeting.

The phase two meeting might more appropriately be described as an extended workshop lasting three or four days. The community representatives and tribal liaison travel

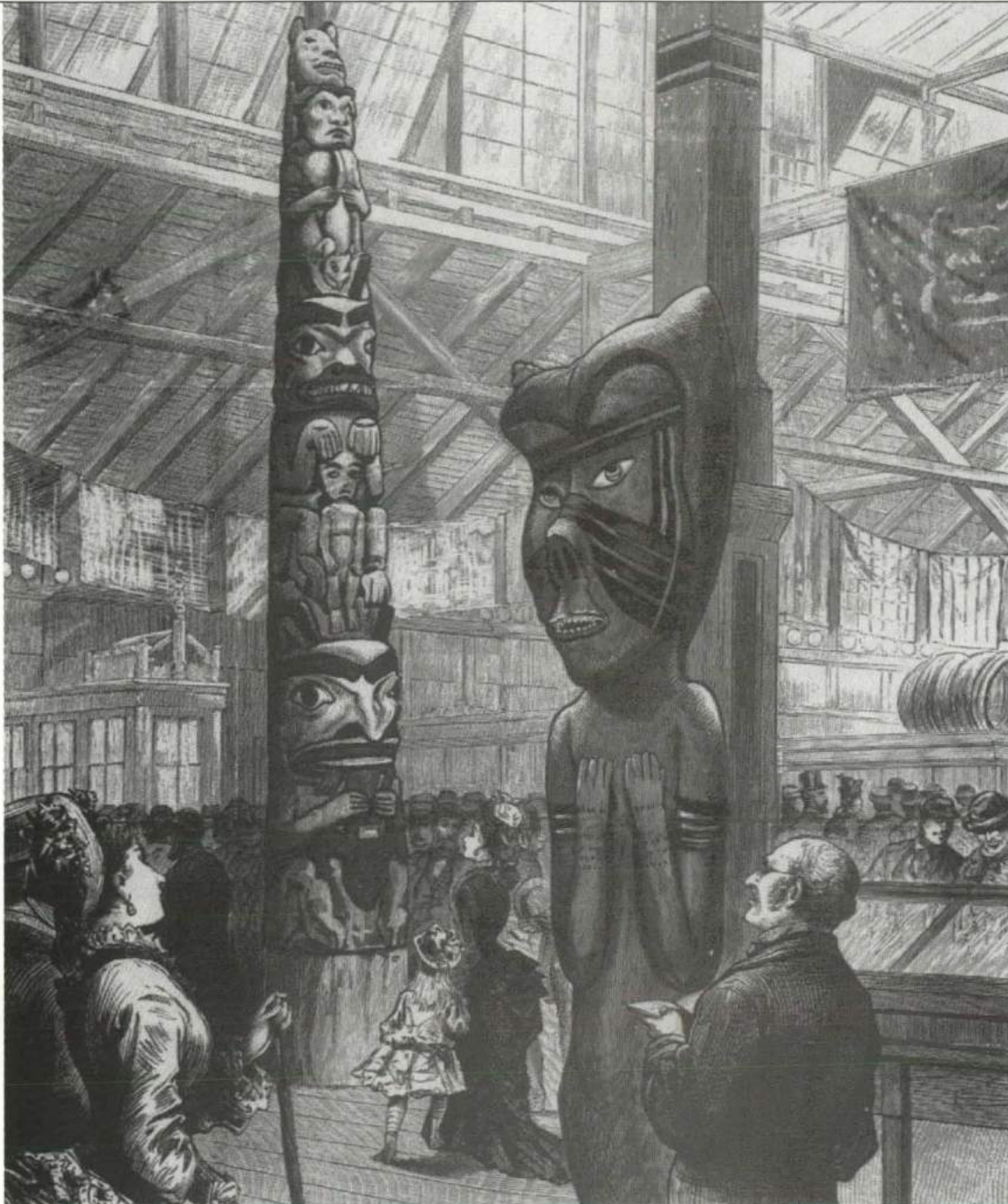
A tribal liaison serves as the museum's primary contact in each community and works closely with museum staff all the way to opening day and beyond.

to the museum where they are afforded the opportunity to see all of the materials from and about their community that are in the museum's possession, including objects, photographs, and archival documents. These are the primary materials they select from to illustrate their chosen epitomizing events. Before returning to their community, the representatives and liaison meet with the exhibit designer to discuss the epitomizing events, the selected materials, and ideas for presenting their tribal history. Based on these conversations, the designer begins to design their tribal history gallery.

When a community's gallery is at the schematic stage, museum staff returns to that community and presents it at a public meeting. At this phase three meeting community members see the results of the phase two workshop attended by their representatives and liaison, and have an opportunity to comment on that work and to suggest revisions. Feedback from this meeting is incorporated into the evolving design of the tribal history gallery.

The phase four meeting is held at the museum and lasts one or two days. Tribal liaisons from the collaborating communities attend this meeting. Each liaison reviews the design of their community's tribal history gallery and also sees how the other communities are presenting their tribal histories. This is an opportunity for these individuals to network with each other and to see how the 12 tribal histories are linked to the six geographic places presented in the exhibition. By this point in the process, the designer has completed work on the four exhibition components whose content is controlled by the museum. The tribal history galleries too are highly refined by this meeting, but not to such a degree that recommendations, substitutions, deletions, or additions from the tribal liaisons cannot be incorporated.

After implementing the tribal liaison's suggestions, a final design of the tribal history gallery is produced by the designer. This design is rendered as completely and accurately as possible, and then taken to the community for the phase five meeting. At this third public meeting, to which the entire community is again invited, the tribal history



"The Indian Department, in the United States Government Building." *Frank Leslie's Historical Register*, 100.

gallery is presented and the community is asked for their approval. Upon approval, the design of the gallery is set. Should changes to the gallery be undertaken by the museum or the designer, staff members return again to the community for another approval. In other words, when community members sign off on the design, they should experience no surprises when they eventually have the opportunity to visit the museum exhibition.

There is nothing necessarily new or unique about this

collaborative methodology. Many individuals and museums conceive of the work they do with Indians and tribal communities along similar lines. This model does, however, articulate the rights and responsibilities of the collaborating partners. The museum is responsible for developing an overarching philosophical framework for the exhibition that is neither museum-specific nor tribe-specific. It is also responsible for identifying all items in its collections pertaining to the collaborating communities, for sharing this information with those communities, and for funding the



processes of developing and presenting each tribal history. The museum has the right, within the parameters of the philosophical framework, to develop the other four components of the exhibition in its own way. Tribal communities, on the other hand, have the right to choose whether or not to participate in this process. Should they choose to collaborate, they have the right to be treated as tribal nations, to have preeminent authority—within the parameters of the philosophical framework—over the design and content of their history gallery, and to retain all intellectual and cultural property rights to the information shared knowingly and unknowingly with museum staff. Tribal communities are responsible for making each of the history galleries uniquely theirs by participating fully in the process of identifying, and then sharing accounts of, those important events they or their ancestors experienced that fundamentally shapes who they are as a community.

The above discussion advocates a reevaluation in the process of developing collaborative exhibitions, not only in the relationships between museums and participating communities but also in the interpersonal and interdepartmental relationships within museums themselves. Collaboration is a complex and complicated undertaking that necessarily de-centers the status quo control that individuals and departments within museums conventionally exercise throughout the process of developing exhibitions. It is not surprising, therefore, that the source of some of the staunchest opposition to implementing this framework remains within museums themselves. This frustrating phenomenon is manifested in many forms and is mitigated in large measure by externally vetting the philosophical, conceptual, and methodological bases of the exhibition early in the process. The support from “big thinkers” beyond the walls of the museum positively impact the museum’s moral imperative to keep its collaborating commitments.

When tribal communities and museums set this collaborative process in motion a moral and ethical relationship is established between the two entities. It has been my experience that, almost without exception, community members find the iterative process exciting. This is due in part to the fact that it respects their knowledge and decision-making abilities, but also, one suspects, because it sets up an ongoing relationship between their community and the museum. The museum is not just coming into their community once and appropriating what it needs and then going away and doing with that information what it wants. Rather, the museum is committing itself to an ongoing collaboration with community members, a partnership wherein communities exert a considerable amount of decision-making authority with regard to their tribal histories. Working within the philosophical framework of the exhibition, community members decide which events to present, what information to share about each event, who within their community will share the

information, which objects and images to use to illustrate the events, and even the shape and design of the space within which their history is exhibited. They are telling their own histories from their own perspectives using their own words, instead of being studied by non-members who then tell an outsider’s version of their history. This level of community involvement and authority is rare.

It is a very potent experience for community members to revisit many of the important events presented in their tribal histories. In some instances, they are sharing their experiences and stories with outsiders for the first time. And their stories are properly their intellectual property. They do not want to invest their time, efforts, and emotions if the process is not going to be done right or if the final product is not going to be good in their eyes. So the museum has moral and ethical commitments to the communities with which it works. And that’s the issue: are the commitments going to be honored? Or are they going to be like so many other promises made by outsiders that are cast aside when the museum finds it convenient to do so? The history of relations between tribal communities and outside museums suggests to community members that they judge the museum on its actions instead of its words. History is replete with good intentions from museums gone awry. Therefore, the process is necessarily iterative, takes place over a period of time, and considerably de-centers the traditional authority of the museum.

Another issue that arises from this collaborative process is that related processes are set in motion within the communities themselves. Though these intra-community processes result from participating in the process, they operate independent from the museum. In many instances, the public meetings to which the entire community is invited are the first times that community members have gathered together to discuss tribal history. Aside from the political machinations that often accompany such gatherings, deep-seated issues within the communities are brought into these discussions. Questions concerning authority to speak, personal character, information dissemination, and loss of tribal knowledge are not uncommon. A recurring theme is that knowledge of the “old ways” passed on with the last of the generation who were educated by the community instead of by formal schools. With a deep sense of loss, community members repeatedly say that this exhibition is too late; that the old men and women who knew the stories have all passed on. Ironically, after having said this, tribal members are then identified who do know the stories. And this is one of the benefits of the process that accrues solely to the community: the collective knowledge of the community is recognized and affirmed. In discussing their tribal history in public formats, individuals share stories and opinions that other community members are keenly interested in hearing. One outcome of this is that the communities themselves wish

Collaboration
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undertaking that
necessarily
de-centers the
status quo
control
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and departments
within museums
conventionally exercise
throughout
the process of
developing
exhibitions.



to retain copies of the information compiled during the process, and to make it available to community members.

The collaborative process presented herein outlines a different way for museum staff to work with community members. The community people involved are not the usual "rolodex" Indians; they may not be widely known in the museum world, or even beyond their own communities in some cases. Most of the people participating in this process are full participants in the day-to-day lives of their communities and often have limited experience working with museums. They become deeply invested in the process. They were born and raised in their communities, and they live there now and they will remain living there until their time on this earth is up, at which point they most likely will be interred in their homelands. Many of their ancestors played prominent roles in their community's history, and most of the participants today play leadership roles of one sort or another. Their reputations are on the line. Museum staff find themselves working intensively with community members whom they had not previously known and working with them in new ways. The relationships between staff and community members develop in both the community setting and the museum's urban milieu. All of these relationships entail obligations and responsibilities that require a lot of time and commitment to maintain.

On the day before Ishi died, his good friend and director of the Museum of Anthropology, Alfred Kroeber, wrote a letter from New York City to his colleague, the museum's curator Edward Gifford. Keenly aware that he probably would not see Ishi alive again, Kroeber conveyed his wishes should Ishi pass away:

"Please stand by our contingently made outline of action, and insist on it as my personal wish. There is no objection to a case (death mask). I do not, however, see that an autopsy would lead to anything of consequence, but would resolve itself into a general dissection. Please shut down on it. As to disposal of the body, I must ask you as my personal representative to yield nothing at all under any circumstances. If there is any talk about the interests of science, say for me that science can go to hell. We propose to stand by our friends" (Kroeber 1961: 234).

Six days later, Gifford replied to Kroeber by return mail:

"I took the stand which you asked me to take some time ago: namely that he [Ishi] have a Christian burial like any other friend. The only departures from your request were that a simple autopsy was performed and that the brain was

preserved. The matter was not entirely in my hands—in short what happened amounts to a compromise between science and sentiment with myself on the side of sentiment" (Kroeber 1961: 235).

Even with explicit instructions to the contrary from both its renowned director and its current curator, the Museum of Anthropology approved the dissection of Ishi's body and the extraction of his brain. This morbid behavior not only contradicted the wishes of Kroeber and Gifford, but was also inimical to Ishi's personal request and his tribal beliefs. Because his knowledge and expertise proved invaluable to its research program and institutional stature, the Museum accommodated Ishi as long as he lived. Upon his death, however, commitments made to him were unforgivably forsaken in the name of science and the public's right to know. Seven months later Kroeber himself capitulated to these ulterior forces in a letter to Aleš Hrdlička, head of the physical anthropology department of the Smithsonian Institution: "I find that at Ishi's death last spring his brain was removed and preserved. There is no one here who can put it to scientific use. If you wish it, I shall be glad to deposit it in the National Museum Collection" (Thomas 2000: 221). Thus, Ishi's brain was unceremoniously shipped from San Francisco to Washington, DC in January 1917.

Even with contractual obligations, personal commitments, and the best of intentions, museums continue to cut Indians and tribal communities out of legitimate collaboration throughout the exhibition process. Instead of collaborating with communities, museums usually contract with Native individuals whose presence and participation is circumscribed by relegating them to consultants whose minds are mined for acceptable thoughts while their authority is thwarted by their temporary appointments. The compromising and co-opting of Indians has resulted in a legacy of exhibitions that embody non-tribal or even anti-tribal philosophies. An integrated and clearly articulated philosophical, conceptual, and methodological framework that is grounded in tribalism can overcome this legacy. Instead of perpetuating writ large the Museum of Anthropology's manipulation, objectification, and exploitation of Ishi, such a framework outlines a collaborative process for creating exhibitions in which tribal communities exercise legitimate control and decision making authority throughout the process and beyond. The success of this endeavor, however, rests with a commitment from museums to forego their absolute status quo control. It's a moral and ethical decision on their part, and from Parnassus Heights to inside the beltway, their legacy is less than laudatory.

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Working with the Community on Exhibition Development: A Cyberspace Forum

edited by Sonya McDonald

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One way museums are striving for excellence is through direct collaboration with the community in exhibit development. During a three-week period, four experts involved in museum/community collaborations participated in an on-line forum to discuss their experience with museums working with communities to develop exhibits. Forum moderator Jay Rounds initiated the discussion among Barbara Franco, Craig Howe, Miriam Kahn, and Eric Sandweiss.

Goals of Community Collaboration

JAY ROUNDS: Over the past several years there have been frequent calls for museums to “become more responsive to the communities they serve.” That certainly seems reasonable; American museums have been justified by the value they bring to their communities since their first formation in the 1780s. A more interesting idea—and (for some people, at least) more controversial one—is that a good way to achieve this goal is to invite “the community” to become active participants in development of the museum’s exhibits and programs. All of you have been involved in such collaborative efforts between museums and communities. What were the goals of these collaborations? Why did you choose this kind of direct collaboration as your vehicle for strengthening your museums’ ties with your communities?

BARBARA FRANCO: In response to your question, Jay, I have come to think of “doing history” with community participation as a different way to tell the story. What interests me is not only what community members add to the narrative, but also how they shape the story. I have become more and more interested in the importance of “voice” in exhibits. There is no way that I have found to manufacture authentic voices, so it becomes necessary to work with community members to “do” this kind of history. I see the collaboration as stemming from an expression I once heard that “everyone wants to tell you his or her history and everyone wants to know what it means.” I think that our collaborations with community often center around those two realities. There are the stories, the information, and also the hunger for meaning. The stories may come from the community, but meaning often comes from the engagement with the museum and the process of crafting those stories into an exhibit that can be shared with others.

MIRIAM KAHN: I agree with Barbara here, even though I’d have to substitute the word anthropology for history. I did it because, as an anthropologist, I’m much more interested in talking to people than in dusting off and displaying their artifacts without the personal stories behind the artifacts. And once you talk to the individuals, their stories overshadow the objects. Really, all the objects do is trigger the personal stories. So the museum’s job is to infuse those objects with the stories and make them come alive so that the stories, as Barbara says, can be shared with others.

CRAIG HOWE: In response to your initial questions, Jay, one of our goals for collaborating with Indian communities from across the western hemisphere was to facilitate a process whereby each community could present its own unique community-specific history or philosophy—depending on which of the two exhibits they were involved with. In other words, we were trying to counter the dominant and dominating narrative-producing conventions of the museum. Without collaboration directly with communities—as communities—this goal seems unattainable. It cannot be achieved by mainstream museums developing exhibits independently, nor can it be achieved by those museums hiring Indian consultants.



ERIC SANDWEISS: I certainly second Craig's notions as I think the rest of the panel would. I guess the question you provoke, Jay, becomes one of how have we translated that sentiment into practice, as well as, to some extent, whether our concepts of why we're doing it diverge from one another in interesting ways.

Of course, there's plenty of pious talk within the academic and museum professions about returning power to the people, subverting dominant narratives, and so on. While I share the basic motivation behind it, I'm always concerned not to get swept up in some kind of alternative orthodoxy that simply substitutes another elite version of narrative for the existing one. To some extent, I think that conservative critics of "new" museum approaches are correct in sniffing such an approach beneath the surface of some of our profession's efforts over the last decade. The point, I think, should be that we are agents of a pluralist culture and that it's up to us, as public institutions, to represent that culture and further its productive goals. I don't think that has to mean undermining dominant narratives, corporate leadership, or the various other bad-guys of right-thinking museum folk. But it does mean working to make people aware of the meaningful divergences of opinion and outlook that are often muffled by our over-controlled society. Not necessarily "celebrating diversity," as we sometimes say in our shorthand way, for that in itself is a way of quieting serious difference or suppressing serious wrongs. "No," I'd say in answer to Rodney King (or to the lawyer who allegedly wrote the line for him), "we cannot all 'just get along.'" We never have, particularly. America has been made up of competing interest groups, willing to sacrifice some element of their own distinctiveness in order to share in the greater benefits of a mixed society. But that doesn't mean they've ever shown a sustained interest in dropping those differences altogether, or adapting a fully assimilated mindset. So I think it's important, to get back to the collaborative model, that we give people a chance to say their piece, to establish some of the ways in which they don't necessarily agree, or get along, with others, and to have a platform for expressing sometimes fractious differences that are all too often hidden by dominant paradigms of any stripe. There are fewer and fewer forums, in our culture, where such differences can indeed be expressed; given that supposition, perhaps it's time for museums to champion the cause of multiplicity (even if it means discord, at times) rather than the cause of unity that seemed so urgent to our nation in quite different times.

Enough on the high horse. I will mention that our last effort to open up in this way occurred in a collaborative exhibition with the Bosnian refugee community in St. Louis. The exhibit, which opened in November, was a maddening and thoroughly rewarding process. I think we did succeed in getting behind the myths of "ancient ethnic hatreds" (myths that many of us on the staff had bought into as thoroughly as anyone

else) and managed to remain true to expressing what this "community" (actually, 30,000 individuals) wanted to say about themselves, while still holding true to standards of objectivity and scholarship. Now, of course, every museum says pretty much that in the course of projects like these, so it will be up to others of our visitors and our collaborators to bear these opinions out. But I do see this little exhibit as having been a valuable learning experience both for us (who really had to listen and carry out someone else's idea of an exhibition rather than imposing our own) and for our visitors, who I hope will come to expect more of these multi-vocal narratives to be told within our walls in the future.

JAY: Eric mentioned the "community" that his museum worked with, and then noted in parentheses that it was "actually 30,000 individuals." Miriam, in her article in *Museum Anthropology* (Vol. 24, No. 1), observed that "Just when anthropologists are questioning the concept of culture, especially as a bounded, integrated whole, those same groups who have been invited into museums are clinging passionately to it, conscious of its power as a marker of modern identity."

What do we actually mean when we say that we're "working with a community"? These collaborations usually produce exhibits that tell stories about that same community. It's

Craig Howe



One of the responsibilities of museum professionals when planning a community exhibit is to articulate their definition of community so that from the universe of possible communities an appropriate subset can be identified and justified.



generally recognized that by displaying an artifact in a museum we bestow a value and significance and legitimacy on it that it might not otherwise have had. Could we, in the same way, create the appearance that a community exists where it really doesn't by mounting an exhibit about it? If so, is this a good thing or a bad thing?

CRAIG: That's a good point, Jay. There seems to be a fundamental difference between a museum-going community, a neighborhood community, a Girl Scout community, and a tribal community, and perhaps that difference correlates to varying collaborative strategies museums undertake when working with these and other "communities." One of the responsibilities of museum professionals when planning a community exhibit, therefore, is to articulate their definition of community so that from the universe of possible communities an appropriate subset can be identified and justified.

MIRIAM: Yes, these are excellent points, Jay. And, I agree with Craig that there are many types of communities, all artificially created by the museum for various purposes. I think that the word community has been used in particularly vague ways when referring to individuals who advise the museum about cultural content (tribal elders, advisory boards, etc.). I always think that museum professionals, themselves, feel awkward with this term. I certainly do. It's in part because we know that we're creating an artificial

community when we select the advisors, and in part because we know that no matter how many individuals we consult, whether 3 or 30,000, these are just individuals' opinions and can never reflect any "community."

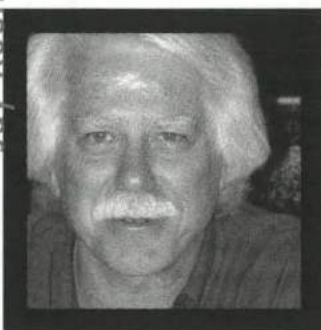
But to respond to your question, Jay, about whether we are, in effect, creating these communities... I'd say that we're at least giving them, and certain individuals within them, more prominence. One of our advisors recently told me that now when she goes about her business in Seattle people often come up to her and say, "I know you. I've seen you (in the video) at the Burke Museum." She likes this because being conspicuous coincides with her desire to heighten other peoples' awareness of her culture and its values. So, while the museum uses the community members to further its causes, the community members can, and should, use the museum to do the same for themselves.

JAY: Miriam, earlier I quoted your statement that "anthropologists are questioning the concept of culture." Since possession of a common "culture" is frequently cited as what makes a group of people a "community," this has important implications. Can you expand a little on how the thinking in anthropology is questioning the traditional concept of culture?

MIRIAM: This is a tough one, because even within anthropology there is great divergence of opinion. But what anthropologists do agree on is that culture, once thought of as rather bounded and static, is now understood to be a dynamic, open-ended, and individualized process. And people, especially today, engage in multiple cultures. This relates directly to museum exhibits and a museum's inability, in my opinion, to really represent things cultural. Museum exhibits, traditionally, have been static glassed-in boxes but, as we know, people and cultures can't be boxed in or labeled in one way. Recently, museums have been trying to get out of the box, so to speak. They're moving from artifact-oriented displays to exhibits built around people and ideas, and infused with multiple voices and opinions. They include more videos, demonstrations, performances, and live guides. But then one has to wonder whether it wouldn't just be better to use a totally different format to begin with. Maybe film or performance can more adequately and accurately communicate culture. It's tough to do it in an enclosed and limited space with display cases and labels.

BARBARA: Miriam, you raise an interesting quandary for museums. We just completed an exhibition on "Growing Up in Washington" that is based on oral histories. I also know that visitors to museums highly value the evidence of artifacts as less moderated than even a performance or a video. I think that there is still tremendous meaning that is conveyed by artifacts in conjunction with oral history and live performances. The real power of museum exhibits is allowing

Jay Rounds



Traditional ethnographic exhibits treated culture as an absolute determinant, with little room for individual identity or agency.



visitors to access multiple sources of information. I am not ready to give up on artifacts yet.

Individual and Communities

JAY: John Kuo Wei Tchen, in his article about the Chinatown History Project (in Karp, Kremer and Lavine's *Museums and Communities*), argued that community-oriented exhibits can run the risk of "cultural nationalism." That is, the individuals who constitute the community can be reduced to nothing but representatives of the culture. "To treat a bachelor laundry worker who spent many years in Cuba simply as a 'Chinese,' lumping him into the same category as a Hong Kong import-export merchant with a family, does great violence to both individual's unique life histories. Their Chineseness can easily be overemphasized, becoming an essentialist and quasi-generic characteristic untouchable by comparisons with other experiences. The identity of a Chinese resident of New York has been formed by many layers of influences."

I think it's true that traditional ethnographic exhibits treated culture as an absolute determinant, with little room for individual identity or agency within the community. Now we've come to recognize that individuals are multi-cultural within themselves, moving skillfully from one cultural setting to another in different aspects of their lives. We're starting to evolve new modes of exhibitry that focus more on personal biographies than on abstract "cultural characteristics."

Some community collaboration exhibits, though, seem more like those old-style exhibits based on cultural determinism. Is this okay when the themes come from members of the community themselves? Or is there a danger that we'll end up with a new form of marginalization, in which anglos are depicted as freewilled agents who treat culture as a tool box for pursuing their own ends, while minority peoples are over-identified with their cultures and given no credit for personal agency? Or I am just spinning out another "dominating narrative" in which we think that other people surely must be like we imagine ourselves to be?

CRAIG: You present an interesting dilemma, Jay, which arises when the focus of an exhibit is on individuals and individual agency—even when the rhetoric is that the exhibit is community-based. Again we are back to the issue of defining what community means. What is entailed by a shift in focus from individuals to communities? Are exhibits that focus on communities necessarily based on cultural determinism? Our experience continues to be that collaborative exhibits with tribal communities can be conceived in such a way as to recognize and acknowledge the wide range of biological, cultural, spiritual, social, political, etc. backgrounds between and within individual tribal members yet still focus on community histories and philosophies. Just as there can be communities whose

majority members are anglo, so too can minority peoples be individualistic. The dilemma is not one of anglo vs. non-anglo, but rather individualism versus communalism.

JAY: I certainly agree that the issue is not "anglo vs. non-anglo"—that people in all "communities" exhibit the same complex mixture of individualism and communalism. My concern is to avoid exhibits that ignore this fact, and that tend to depict majorities in terms of individualism and minorities in terms of communalism. Certainly there's nothing in the nature of exhibits or of community collaborations in exhibit development that makes this inevitable. (For instance, I thought that Eric's exhibit on Bosnians in St. Louis did a good job of presenting people as individuals who happen to value a shared heritage.) But it does sometimes happen. One strength of community collaborations is to bring the real people into the process, instead of only their artifacts. This should result in exhibits that emphasize people rather than stuff, however rich in artifacts the exhibits might be.

CRAIG: You are right, Jay, in that simplistic exhibits caricaturing majorities and minorities are to be avoided, and that bringing people who are being exhibited about into museums is a good thing. But as Miriam suggested, community members should be involved in collaborative exhibitions from their conception, not incorporated/consulted with during the process. It also seems to me that exhibitions focusing on communities—as opposed to individuals—should more appropriately examine those things that define communities; things that transcend individuals and artifacts. In other words, things such as values, beliefs, and experiences shared by community members and their ancestors, and, presumably/hopefully, by their descendants. Individuals are born, live and die, whereas their communities existed before them, and again, hopefully/presumably after them.

BARBARA: Back to the issue Craig raised of individuals versus communities, I want to weigh in with some of the evidence that David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig uncovered in their survey, *The Presence of the Past*. They discovered that there were differences in how people saw their own history—with the majority seeing family as central, while African Americans experienced history as part of a larger community. It is a good reminder that different groups of people define themselves and their lives in different relationships to their communities. David is now very interested in pursuing the very strong "personal" approach that Americans seem to adopt toward history for further meaning. I think one interesting finding that comes out of this kind of questioning is a renewed appreciation among historians for how multi-cultural individuals are. Thelen has pointed out to me that themes, no matter how broad, are by their nature limiting, whereas a person's life involves



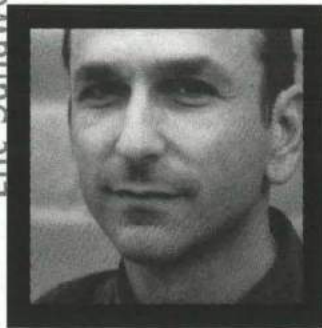
multiple identities and membership in multiple communities. For history museums, the definition of community becomes complex in itself.

Do the Community Representatives Understand Modern Museums?

JAY: AAM has been holding a series of “community dialogues” about these issues. The notes from the first of these state “While diversity of participants is an essential element for the dialogues, community participants who lacked current museum experience were at a great disadvantage. Many still clung to 20 year-old perceptions of what museums are.” My interpretation is that museums have sometimes entered community collaborations with the idea of doing leading-edge, post-mod exhibitions—perhaps even deconstructing outdated ideas about culture—only to discover that their community partners want to do a very traditional exhibition presenting a very traditional view of their culture. What’s been your experience?

CRAIG: My experience has been that if museums want to do a post-mod exhibit, for instance, then chances are any community will be at a “great disadvantage.” However, if a museum wishes to facilitate a community’s presentation about some aspect of itself (for example, its history or philosophy), then the museum experience of community members is irrelevant.

Eric Sandweiss



The museum has a mentoring role to play—not strictly in imparting the highest professional standards of its appropriate discipline, but in revealing the enormous possibilities for creative story telling in a three-dimensional environment.

ERIC: I agree that an approach that relies too heavily upon museum-defined approaches runs the danger of losing the very participants whom we seek to engage. It is interesting, and chastening, to note how much of the visiting public really does have what we might think of as traditional or old-fashioned expectations for the exhibits that we run. I may be overly optimistic, but I think there’s a middle way through all this, one that entails listening to (and honoring) the expectations of a collaborating group while still offering a framework in which creative thinking and unexpected results are encouraged. In this sense, the museum has a mentoring role to play—not strictly in imparting the highest professional standards of its appropriate discipline (anthropology, history, science, etc.), but in revealing the enormous possibilities for creative story telling in a three-dimensional environment. This is a process in which we are now engaged in the early stages of planning a collaborative exhibit with St. Louis-area Girl Scouts. We find ourselves pushing our partners’ sense both of the process (why not involve all the girls in researching, planning, designing the exhibit?), and of the product (what if this was some kind of different-looking space from the objects-on-the-wall that you’re now conceiving?). Such pushing is valid, I think, so long as we honor the other end of the agreement, which is to recognize ourselves as a go-between, or a venue, for a project, a story, a message that comes from our partner rather than from us. Tricky line to draw, of course. So anyway, I think museums can still deal in surprise and delight without necessarily indulging in radical experimentation that leaves their collaborators or visitors feeling high and dry.

MIRIAM: I agree with you, Eric, that we should see ourselves as a go-between or facilitator. Ideally, the collaborative process should mean that all parties collaborate equally. A decade or so ago, before I became as heavily involved as I did in a collaborative exhibit, I had a more academically idealistic (post-modern?) vision and thought that the museum’s job was merely to provide the space for the community members to express their voices. But during the process of working with community members (through the “Pacific Voices” exhibit at the Burke Museum, where we teamed up with some 150 community members), I came to understand that the greatest personal benefit and most accurate and engaging product occurred when everyone was treated as equal partners. My previously held beliefs about the divide between the museum providing space and the community providing content were all shattered during this process. For example, when we were working with several members of Seattle’s Hawaiian community in designing an exhibit component on hula as language, Hawaiians—and not museum technicians—were the ones who figured out how to create a synchronized sound/light system so visitors would see which instruments they were listening to. And when working with members of the Samoan



community, it was the museum curator—and not the Samoans—who was asked to help communicate much of the content. As I was told by one Samoan, “You should ask an anthropologist because they would know better than I do.” I think the real key is collaboration, which includes lots of listening, understanding, compromising, and respecting of others’ viewpoints. And this is a multi-lane street. I say multi-lane, rather than two-lane, because often there can be greater disagreement among museum staff members or among community members than between the artificial categories of museum staff and community.

BARBARA: I would like to follow up on Eric’s comment about museums pursuing their own ideas and leaving the community members behind. At the Minnesota History Center’s exhibit on “Minnesota Communities,” one of the communities, the Winnebago Indians, were selected because they are primarily an urban Indian community in the Twin Cities. While the curators were interested in topics of contemporary urban Indian life, the tribal members were interested in piecing together their early history of displacement and wanted to document their traditional culture. It was only after the exhibit opened and they had satisfied their cultural needs that they were willing to even consider some of the more difficult topics of contemporary Indian life that had interested the curators. This experience has been a constant reminder to me that although the museum staff often look at the exhibition project as a product with an end date, the community more often sees it as a process that will be ongoing and open-ended.

MIRIAM: I agree wholeheartedly with Barbara about the process being as important as, if not more important than, the product. And this reminds me of a piece of practical advice. Make sure that the relationships with community members are maintained and nurtured even long after the exhibit has opened.

ERIC: Ditto on the issue of follow-up and sustained relationships. The people we work with really do have a different notion from that maintained by museum staff, in terms of the duration of projects. This is an area that I’m not sure I’ve seen solved successfully yet, as you try to reconcile the culture of the annual budget and the rotating exhibit with the culture of long-term, on-again-off-again interests and opportunities. Anyone have a good suggestion for just how those relationships can be sustained in a meaningful way without tying up unavailable resources or foiling institutional planning?

BARBARA: One solution to this dilemma is one that we are working on as part of the concept of a new City Museum for Washington, D.C. Based on my own experience in Minnesota, I have realized that communities want their cake, and they want to eat it too. That is, they want to control their own

community history, but they also want recognition from larger society. We are working on a community-based network of “neighborhood gateways” that can provide continuity and prolonged relationships with the City Museum, but have an autonomy that allows them to continue to function and develop on their own. I don’t know how well these will work, but they will address the need to have a sustainable relationship with communities that lasts beyond a temporary exhibit or a special program.

CRAIG: The first thing that comes to mind, in response to Eric’s question about resources and institutional planning, is that before museums undertake collaborative projects with communities they commit the resources to carry out a long-term relationship. Having said that, how about conceiving the exhibit as a traveling exhibition, even if the only place it “travels” to is the community itself. Or it could be developed in the community and then “travel” to the museum, and then anywhere else. Community members, of course, would be involved in all aspects of the process, including the travel opportunities. A digital record of the exhibition too could be created, therefore enabling it to travel through cyberspace, to be archived in numerous places, including the museum where future visitors would have access to it, and in schools and libraries and other such community institutions where community members would likewise have access to the virtual exhibition long

Barbara Franco



Although the museum staff often look at the exhibition project as a product with an end date, the community more often sees it as a process that will be ongoing and open-ended.



after the physical one was dismantled. Face-to-face contact is so important; perhaps community representatives would be regularly invited to update or make additions to the existing and exhibited community materials archived at the museum. Community members could be commissioned to produce new acquisitions for the museum's collections. Maybe the afternoon of the anniversary of some significant community event, or the original opening of the exhibition, is annually set aside for community groups, such as school classes or senior centers, to visit the museum. How about setting a date four or seven years into the future for a follow-up exhibition, and then working together to produce it? It seems to me there are limitless opportunities. It also seems important that these opportunities not rely solely on particular persons either in the community or the museum. These ongoing relationships are between the museum as an institution and the community as an entity that transcends the personalities and lives of individuals. The bottom line, I guess, is that whatever is decided upon needs to be integrated into the budgetary and planning processes of the museum.

MIRIAM: These are superb ideas, Craig. And you're right about the importance of needing to plan ahead for specific mechanisms that sustain the relationship. You also raise a valid point that the relationships are between the community and the institution, not necessarily between individuals. But the truth is that during these collaborative endeavors one

Miriam Kahn



Start the collaborative process from the very start. Don't set the agenda within the museum and then add community members later as they fit into the museum's plans. Community members need to be present from the moment of conception.

does develop friendships with individuals and I think these must also be nurtured. So, I'd add one other way in which relationships can be kept current that may have nothing to do with any exhibit or follow-up exhibits. I'm thinking of simply keeping in touch with the individuals, inviting them to various events at the museum, going to events in their communities, meeting them for lunch, etc. For example, there's one woman in Seattle's Chinese community with whom I've spent a lot of time over the past several years during the planning and installation of the "Pacific Voices" exhibit. We traveled together to Los Angeles for a few days in order to have certain New Years food made in plastic for the exhibit. You can't have that kind of hilarious experience with someone (renting a car in LA, getting lost on the freeways, trying out various restaurants and foods, ordering a large fridge for our hotel room so we could keep all the food cold overnight, getting it to the place that made the plastic molds in the morning while it still looked fresh, etc.) and then not have the person become a friend.

Practical Advice

JAY: What practical advice do you have for museum people who are considering developing an upcoming exhibit through community collaboration?

MIRIAM: Start the collaborative process from the very start. Don't set the agenda within the museum and then add community members later as they fit into the museum's plans. Community members need to be present from the moment of conception. And think of the community as broadly as possible. Don't neglect the youth.

CRAIG: Very sage advice, Miriam. Collaboration begins at the beginning, and depending on the community, the underlying concepts of the exhibit should be explicitly drawn from its unique philosophy. Establish criteria to differentiate between who and what is within or outside of the "community," then articulate a clear and specific focus to the exhibit. Finally, again as Miriam suggests, explore that particular topic as broadly as possible within those parameters, utilizing an iterative process involving public meetings held in the community to which all community members are invited.

ERIC: In addition to the expected issues of clarifying responsibilities, intentions, etc. from the outset, I think collaboration depends on a mutual respect for the area(s) of expertise that each party brings to the table. For the museum this means not backing down from offering the kinds of skills and insights that they possess, but also understanding that the substance and inspiration of the project may well rest with their partner. I suppose that, as in any partnership, there needs to be some spark ignited by those complementary skills or points of view—and that that spark itself ignites something unexpected and delightful. Staying open to that surprise



ending is ultimately what I think can make a collaboration something more than the blurring of a bunch of different viewpoints into one mushy whole.

BARBARA: I agree with the comments of Craig and Eric, but I would go one step further. You have to allow time and be open to where the community's involvement may take you. I also think that it is important to not only state the museum's agenda for doing an exhibit, but also be open to letting the community itself help set that agenda. My own experience is that we are happy to include communities in our agenda, but we are less open to letting them establish the agendas for exhibits. This is often an issue in museum projects.

CRAIG: Those last two sentences, Barbara, are critical: whose underlying philosophy establishes the criteria and parameters of an exhibit? And what does it mean if the museum does it or the community does it?

BARBARA: I think museums have to be honest with themselves that if they are setting the agenda, the result will be a very different exhibition and outcome than if the community is involved in setting the agenda. We have to be honest with ourselves, our audiences and the communities that we are working with from the outset.

MIRIAM: Another very important practical thing is to go out into the community as much as possible, and not to expect the community members to always come to the museum. This helps set up a more balanced relationship in which the territory and activities of both parties are equally valued. It also communicates to the community members that the museum is making an

effort to cross boundaries (geographically and symbolically) and reach out. And, perhaps most importantly, the museum professionals can learn a lot by stepping out, seeing where advisors live and work, attending community events and festivals, tasting different foods, and generally meeting more individuals. It can be very rewarding personally, and fun.

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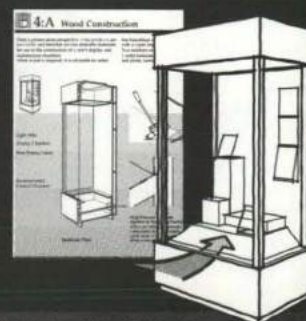
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