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MUSEUM

Wellbeing
JOURNEYS

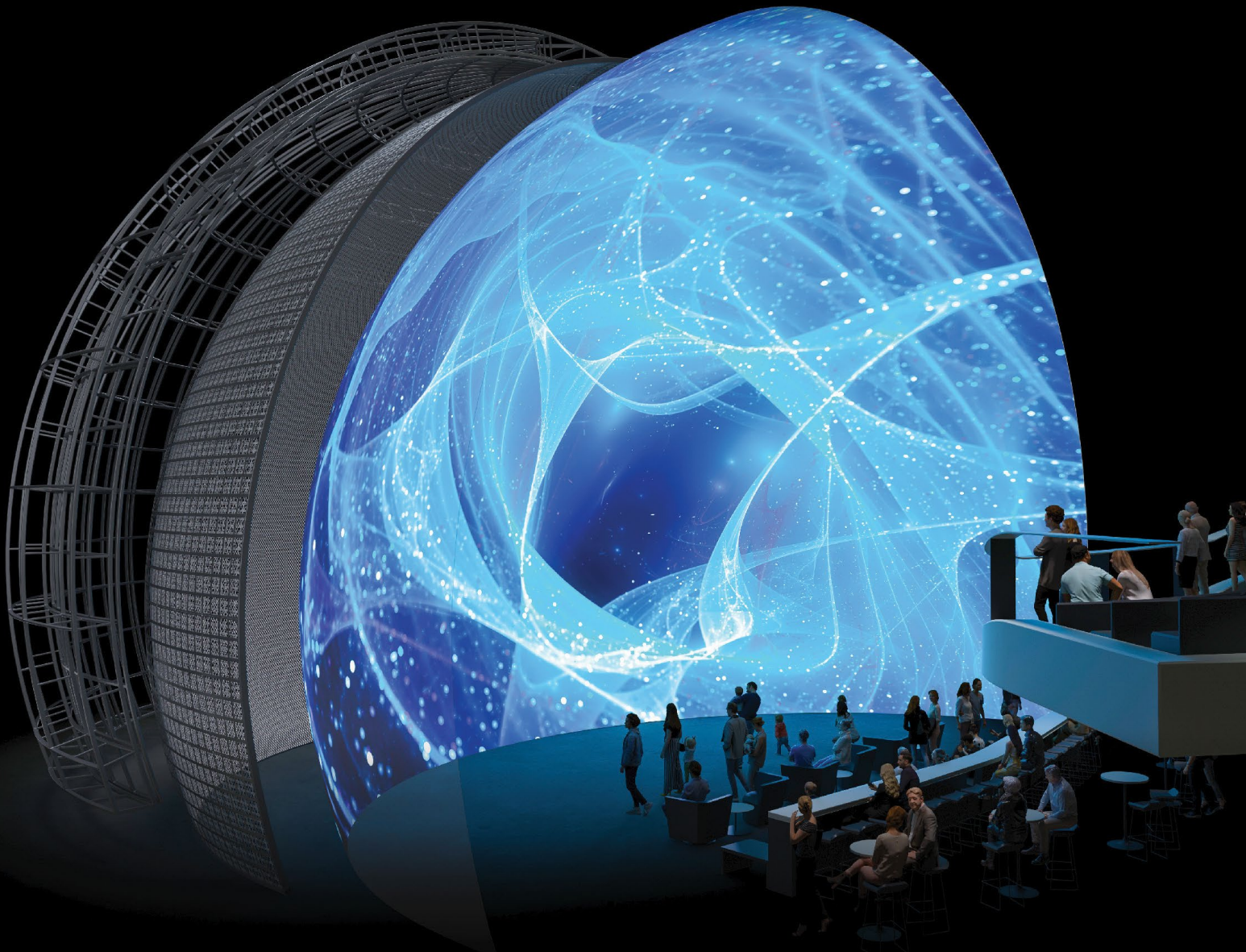


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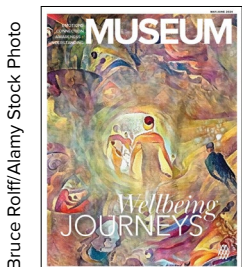
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TREASURES



The Curious Life

Hello, *Museum* readers! I'm delighted to address you for the first time as AAM's new President and CEO. As I dive into the role, I look forward to meeting many of you and hearing about your opportunities and successes as we create a shared vision for the next phase of our Alliance. In the meantime, I want to introduce myself briefly by sharing a story about what first brought me to this field.

My first museum memory dates back to the 1970s, when my mother took me and my younger twin brothers to The Metropolitan Museum of Art to see "Treasures of Tutankhamun," the legendary exhibition that introduced America to King Tut. We traveled a fair distance from our neighborhood in Brooklyn to the fancy Upper East Side of Manhattan. Still, my mother, a schoolteacher who always prioritized education and informal learning experiences, promised it would be worth the trip. Even my usually rambunctious brothers were quiet and attentive as she squeezed our hands and told us how special what we were about to see would be, the thousands-of-years-old artifacts and everything they revealed about how people had once lived and worshipped.

As we entered the exhibition, I felt like I had gone through a portal directly to ancient Egypt. I studied the vibrant, unfamiliar objects on display with fascination, envisioning the rich civilization they must have come from. I felt my mind expanding as I began to think more about Egypt and its place in the world. If this was just one fraction of Africa, how many other mesmerizing cultures and stories must this huge continent contain? From that moment, I was hooked on history, and each fact I discovered opened the door to a new question.

Decades later, as a museum professional, I began to see that this was far from an isolated case. It was just one example of the primary ways museums change lives: expanding knowledge and piquing curiosity. And curiosity is no small thing. It drives new ideas and leads

us to create new innovations, systems, and ways of working. Research tells us it fosters practical life outcomes, self-actualization, and prosocial effects.

As we delve into the intersection of museums, health, and wellbeing—the central focus of this year's AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo and this magazine issue—it's essential to consider how we can amplify this impact within our communities. We must find novel ways to welcome people into our spaces and then show them that we're trustworthy and have something to offer. I've been lucky to see this in action several times in my own career, such as through the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago's Teen Program, which turns local students into fixtures of the museum community and helps them reshape their perspective on careers and higher education. Remarkably, the cost of such initiatives can be as minimal as repurposing unused space, exemplified by the Muhammad Ali Center's decision to offer classrooms to the Decode Project, a local tutoring program supporting dyslexic learners.

As you contemplate how you can turn your museum into a community hub, converting more and more people to the curious life as you expose them to the immersive yet factual storytelling that museums and cultural institutions deliver, I hope you will tap into the experience and wisdom of your museum peers. Just as we are stronger in our personal lives when connected to our communities, we are stronger as a field when we work together, rooting for each other's success. Please take full advantage of the rich examples and insights about promoting health and wellbeing in this issue and join us in Baltimore for many more. Coming together to thrive is what AAM is all about and what I'm most excited about as I take the reins.

3/22/2024



Marilyn Jackson is the President and CEO of the American Alliance of Museums. She has worked in the cultural sector for 14 years, most recently as the President and CEO of the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Kentucky. Prior to that role, she held positions at the United Way of Metro Chicago; the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago; the Chicago Architecture Foundation; and Six Flags theme parks. Born in Jamaica and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Jackson earned an M.B.A. from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management and her B.S. in Biology and Society from Cornell University.

Thriving Museums, Healthy Communities

The Annual Survey of Museum-Goers asked visitors how museums affect their health and wellbeing. Here are some highlights:

60%

Think **all** museums support emotional wellbeing.

69%

Think museums provide intellectual stimulation and support cognitive health.

3 out of 5

Think museums should share multiple viewpoints so visitors can consider perspectives other than their own.

9 out of 10

Think museums help them feel more connected to others, more specifically:
Half feel more connected to those from different cultures.
Half feel more connected to nature, including the animals that inhabit our planet.



Scan the **QR code** for sources of the statistics and gain deeper insight with related Data Stories from Wilkening Consulting.

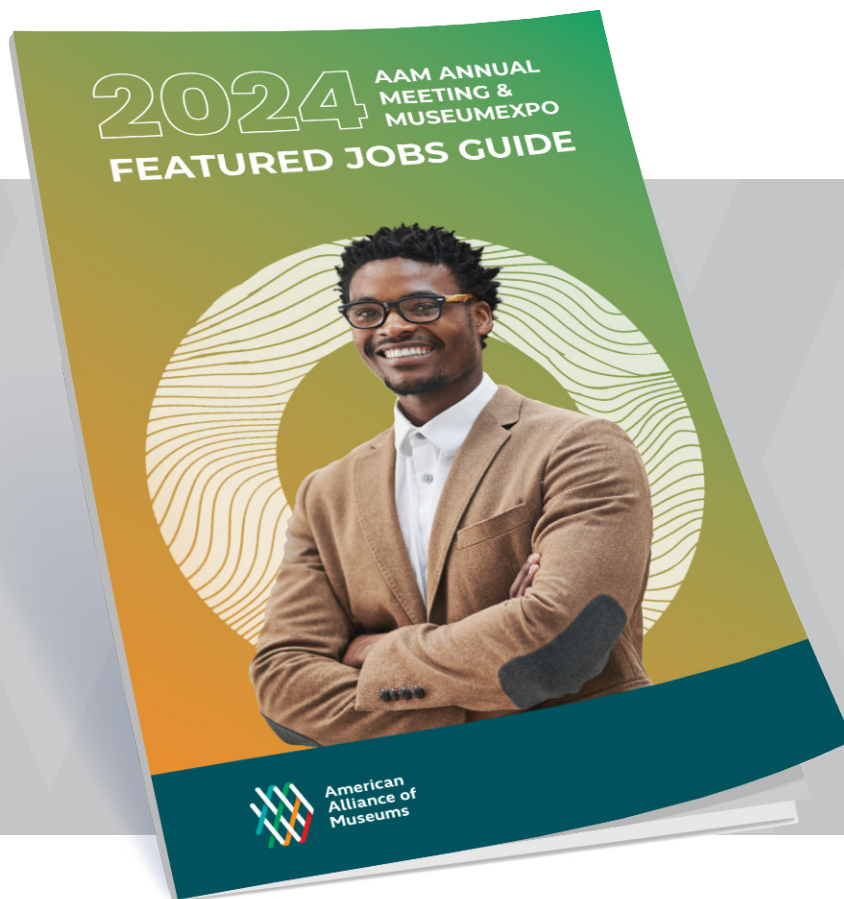
Sources: 2022 and 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers and Broader Population Sampling (AAM + Wilkening Consulting)

By the Numbers was compiled by Susie Wilkening, principal of Wilkening Consulting, wilkeningconsulting.com. Reach Susie at Susie@wilkeningconsulting.com.



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FIRST LOOK

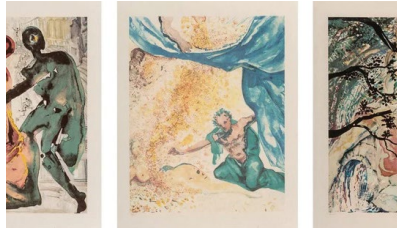
Muckenthaler Cultural Center

“Salvador Dali: Personal Collection of Benjamin Feldman” showcases Dali’s lesser-known works from the personal collection of Benjamin Feldman. Featuring images of sensuality and eroticism, the collection highlights include the Surrealist artist’s iconic *Les Amoureux (The Lovers)* and *Pantagruel*.

Location: Fullerton, CA

Dates: through June 28

Learn more: [themuck.org/
program/2024/salvador-dali](https://themuck.org/program/2024/salvador-dali)



Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art

“Art, Architecture and Ideas: Frank Gehry and Robert Tannen” brings together over five decades of work in a range of media, including architectural models, sculpture, painting, printmaking, urban planning, and product design. Gehry and Tannen’s work has intersected with major projects, built and unbuilt, in New Orleans, the Bio Museo in Panama, and the Freeman house in Pass Christian, Mississippi.

Location: Biloxi, MS

Dates: through July

Learn more: [georgeohr.org/
exhibition/gehry_tannen](https://georgeohr.org/exhibition/gehry_tannen)

Courtesy of Muckenthaler Cultural Center; Gehry Partners, LLP

JUST RELEASED:

Museum Board Leadership: A National Report 2024

We are proud to present the findings of a new national report on museum board leadership. This second edition of the report first fielded in 2017 finds noteworthy progress in recent years, as well as challenges to continued improvement in museum governance including board diversity. Each of the three sections—The People, The Work, and The Finances—presents key finding and resources to guide your progress on tasks ranging from diversifying your board to creating the core governing documents that undergird your museum’s stability.

Download your free copy today. Visit: bit.ly/2024-board-leadership



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Firelei Báez, *Untitled (Les tables de géographie réduites en un jeu de cartes)*, 2022, courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth, New York, photo by Jackie Furtado © Firelei Báez; Victoria Vesna, *Noise Aquarium*, 2022 © Danann Breathnach Photography

Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

“Firelei Báez” features approximately 40 works—paintings, installations, and works on paper—spanning nearly two decades of the artist’s practice and work, which explores the complicated and often incomplete historical narratives that surround the Atlantic basin. The artist will premiere new works in the exhibition, which is slated to tour throughout North America.

Location: Boston, MA

Dates: through Sept. 2

Learn more: icaboston.org/exhibitions/firelei-baez-0



Peabody Essex Museum

“Our Time on Earth,” a large-scale exhibition organized by the Barbican Centre in London with guest curators FranklinTill, illuminates a path toward a more sustainable future through innovative artworks and immersive experiences. Presented as part of the museum’s Climate + Environment Initiative, the exhibition celebrates the power of global creativity to transform the conversation around the climate emergency.

Location: Salem, MA

Dates: through June 9

Learn more: pem.org/exhibitions/our-time-on-earth

2024

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POINT
OF VIEW



The Museum and the Mind

The field of neuroarts is documenting how the arts and aesthetic experiences measurably change the body, brain, and behavior.

By Susan Magsamen

“The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

Ralph Waldo Emerson

was more prescient than he could ever have realized. It was not until the 1960s that neuroscientist Marian Diamond discovered that exposure to enriched environments increased brain matter, specifically in the brain’s outer layer, the cerebral cortex. Prior to her landmark research, scientists believed that the brain remained static until it started to decline in older age. Diamond was the first to observe the brain’s neuroplasticity, yet her findings were disputed and rejected for many years.

Today she is considered one of the founders of modern neuroscience.

Museums are the ultimate enriched environments, or super-enriched spaces, that are good for body, mind, and soul. Museums are dedicated to arousing our curiosity; engaging us in discovery and learning; and evoking our reflection, wonder, and awe.

Artists (and Emerson) have known intuitively what scientists are now proving with rigorous research: aesthetic experiences affect us in extraordinary ways. In short, our brains are wired for art.

Within just the past 25 years, significant advances in technology have allowed us to peer more deeply into that magnificent mechanism that is the brain and better understand what happens when we participate in the arts and aesthetic experiences. The relatively new science of

neuroaesthetics studies how the arts and aesthetic experiences measurably change the body, brain, and behavior—and how this knowledge can be translated into specific practices that advance health and wellbeing. We call the field neuroarts.

Four Concepts of the Neuroarts

The science underpinning the neuroarts can be described through four core concepts. The first is neuroplasticity. Each of

RESOURCES

Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross, *Your Brain on Art*
yourbrainonart.com

NeuroArts Blueprint
neuroartsblueprint.org

International Arts + Mind Lab, The Center for Applied Neuroarts
artsandmindlab.org

Arts on Prescription: A Field Guide for US Communities
arts.ufl.edu/sites/creating-healthy-communities/resources/arts-on-prescription-a-field-guide-for-us-communities/



ENHANCING MUSEUM AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES

Museums already add to the wellbeing of communities they serve. Here are some ways they can be more intentional about it.

Offer immersive and interactive experiences. Research showed that working on an art project for 45 minutes—regardless of skill—can reduce stress by 25 percent. Additionally, people who engaged in the arts were found to have lower mental distress, better mental functioning, and improved quality of life. Consider creating dedicated spaces for visitors to doodle and draw or express their thoughts in writing. Museum staff will benefit from opportunities to participate in these immersive and interactive experiences as well.

Bring more color and nature into the museum. Our eyes can detect more than 10 million hues, and experiencing different colors can change our blood pressure, heart rate, and respiration. Similarly, viewing nature has the capacity to reduce stress and anxiety. Think of ways to bring the outside in and create colorful, nature-inspired spaces.

Think curves rather than corners. Scientists theorize that our brains evolved to recognize—and prefer—curves and rounded objects rather than straight lines and sharp corners. Increasingly, architects are integrating more natural curves into building design and renovation. How could this be incorporated into exhibition design?

Offer traveling exhibits to under-resourced communities. Consider a temporary exhibition in an empty storefront or marketplace stall in a community where residents may not have the opportunity to visit the local museums.

Reach out to health care professionals. An increasing number of health care providers are prescribing arts and aesthetic experiences for their patients. Invite health care professionals to your museum to learn more about how museums can address cognitive issues, isolation, and loneliness and build community.

the 100 billion neurons in the human brain connects to about 10,000 other neurons, and the act of connecting is called a synapse. Neurons need to communicate with one another in order to survive, and novel experiences, such as visiting a museum, create new memories and new connections in our brains. The brain filters the continuous stream of sensory stimuli it receives, retaining the most important ones as memories while discarding the rest.

The second core concept is enriched environments. Scientists who have followed and expanded on Diamond's research have a better understanding of how enriched environments can positively affect our learning, wellbeing, health, and relationships. We are also beginning to understand how to use the pillars of human flourishing—curiosity, awe, surprise, humor, and novelty—to build new neuropathways. Buildings that incorporate intentional and inspirational architecture, interior spaces, and objects can offer deep emotional and lasting connections among those who live, work, and play in them. On the flip side, impoverished environments can have a slow and corrosive effect on health and wellbeing.

The third concept of the neuroarts is the “aesthetic triad.” Developed by University of Pennsylvania professor Anjan Chatterjee and his colleagues, the triad is a theoretical model that explains how our sensorimotor systems, our reward system, and our cognitive knowledge and meaning-making combine to

form a unique aesthetic moment. The model is visualized as a Venn diagram with three circles overlapping in the center, which is the aesthetic experience. The experience is unique to each of us, considering our biology and individual circumstances. The triad helps explain why we might prefer Renaissance art over modern art or enjoy playing a musical instrument more than painting.

The final core concept is the default mode network (DMN), now thought to be the home for the neurological basis of the self. Situated in several parts of the brain, the DMN collectively is the place where our minds wander, wonder, and daydream. The DMN is the neural container that holds our preferences, and it influences how we will react to a piece of art, music, spaces, people, and other experiences.

Perhaps the best news from our research in the neuroarts is that the benefits of aesthetic experiences do not depend on skill. From the very young to the very old, experiencing art in any of its many forms yields multiple positive outcomes, and talent is not a requirement. This is true especially for people who are recovering from a stroke or traumatic brain injury, have mental health concerns including PTSD, or are living in extremely high-stress communities or situations. Longitudinal studies in

the United Kingdom suggest that engaging in an arts activity just once a month can lengthen the lifespan by 10 years.

NeuroArts Blueprint

In 2021, the International Arts + Mind Lab at Johns Hopkins University and the Health, Medicine & Society Program at the Aspen Institute partnered to determine a definitive path forward for the neuroarts field. They created and launched the NeuroArts Blueprint, a five-year global initiative to ensure that the arts and the use of the arts—in all of its many forms—become part of mainstream public health and medicine. The blueprint is based on five core recommendations:

- Strengthen the research foundation of neuroarts.
- Honor and support the many arts practices that promote health and wellbeing.
- Expand and enrich educational and career pathways.
- Advocate for sustainable funding and promote effective policy.
- Build capacity, leadership, and communications strategies.

Museums create profound and memorable aesthetic experiences for their audiences through the collections and stories shared, making them important partners within the NeuroArts Blueprint. The blueprint is developing a global resources center where

museums can both share their work and learn from other organizations. The resource center will include a calendar of events along with funding opportunities, toolkits, professional development, and research.

The blueprint has also launched a community neuroarts coalition initiative where museums, libraries, community and cultural organizations, academic partners, philanthropy, and municipal partners come together at a hyper-local level to address community needs through the lens of the arts and aesthetic experiences.

We are beginning to understand how culture and community through art making and aesthetic experiences are increasing our capacity for imagination and creative thinking. As museums reflect on their evolving role in communities, they might consider expanding their missions to include improving the health and wellbeing of all populations.

 **Susan Magsamen** is the founder and director of the International Arts + Mind Lab, Center for Applied Neuroaesthetics at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where she is a faculty member. She is also the co-director of the NeuroArts Blueprint. Reach her at smagsam1@jhmi.edu.

For AAM resources on health and wellbeing visit bit.ly/health-wellbeing-topic and bit.ly/wellness-compendium.

Do you have health and wellbeing programs at your museum? Let us know by providing brief details at bit.ly/wellness-submissions.



2024

Product Preview Guide

Preview some of the companies sharing their expertise at AAM 2024 in this Guide!

Tim Mack, Visitor Experience Associate, The Walters Art Museum

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To register and view the program visit annualmeeting.aam-us.org.

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- MuseumExpo is also home to the NeighborHubs, Poster Showcase, the AAM Resource Center, and Bookstore where book signings will take place. Connect in the MuseumExpo during the Opening Reception, food and coffee breaks, and Closing Happy Hour.
- We're once again co-locating with **MSA Forward 2024!** Learn best practices and new ideas for store merchandising, operations, and marketing; connect for inspiration and partnership; and do business with museum store vendors offering specials on the expo floor.

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Designing for Connection: Redefining Museums in the Digital Age

In a world marked by an epidemic of loneliness and increasingly segmented echo chambers, shared moments that foster genuine human connection are more important than ever.

By Joseph Wisne, Roto President / CEO

We live in a digital age dominated by screens and in which human contact is increasingly mediated through data algorithms. Yet, over the years, studies have shown the profound power of shared in-person experiences to amplify their impact. Whether collectively listening to music at a live event, watching a movie in a theater, or exploring exhibits at a museum, the simple act of engaging in a location-based activity with others enriches the experience and contributes to improved well-being. In a world marked by an epidemic of loneliness and increasingly segmented echo chambers, these shared moments that foster genuine human connection are more important than ever.

To understand what makes “genuine human connection” so powerful is to break down its elements.

“Genuine” experiences are authentic and substantive in their content and approach. They prioritize “real” over reproductions and share reliable evidence that educates participants while also empowering them to reflect and form their own perspectives.

“Human” moments excite all our senses, literally activating our brains through what we see near and far, feel in our hands and hearts, and hear in all directions. They evoke feelings and elevate shared experiences by often being the spark that prompts direct social interactions.

“Connections” flourish in spaces that offer participants a sense of intrinsic belonging in the world, encouraging bonding and discovery as they engage with compelling stories or purposeful play. These environments create an inclusive atmosphere where we feel a shared sense of purpose, united for even a few moments together.

Institutions across the spectrum excel at and exist to create these “genuine human connections” in our society and culture that both need and crave them. Each organization has a particular specialty: aquariums exist to create human connection through nature, science museums through discovery and big ideas, children’s museums through play, collections museums through objects and empathy, heritage museums through stories, and art museums through, of course, art – both through their collections and the works participants create themselves.

In each of these institutions, technology can be a powerful tool. Applications such as AR/VR, gesture control, projection mapping, gamification, and generative AI, can all positively contribute to creating spaces that support connections,



● The Bakken Museum, Spark



● Roto designed a safe, welcoming space for families to have courageous conversations in Kentucky Science Center's "Uniquely Human" gallery.

empowering new depths in experiences, engagement, and education. Though the museum field cannot be expected to finance innovation in the core technologies themselves, we are the future leaders in creating impactful multisensory experiences with emerging technology. And while big tech companies and game studios will continue to advance core state-of-the-art technologies, it is museum exhibition designers and artists who are best positioned to deploy these technologies in new and clever ways to deliver genuine human connections to the broadest public audiences.

Significantly, a key strength of museums is a weakness in other tech industries – the availability of large, immersive, bespoke physical spaces. It is these spaces and the physical nature of their experiences that make real multisensory connections possible. Museums are also ideal hubs for authentic, non-virtual social gatherings, from daily ticketed attendance to on-site special events.

At Roto, creating genuine human connection is more than a guiding principle. It is core to our essence and foundational to our culture.

While not the exclusive venues in which these kinds of interactions can happen, museums hold a distinct advantage in their ability to leverage their scale, often central locations, increasingly flexible programming, and strong public trust to deliver for the cause of human connection what no other cultural force can.

This is the exciting future of museums and attractions Roto envisions for the coming decades. It is time the cultural sector moves beyond simply showcasing the landscape of genuine human connection. It's time we became its architects. Together, let's forge a future where

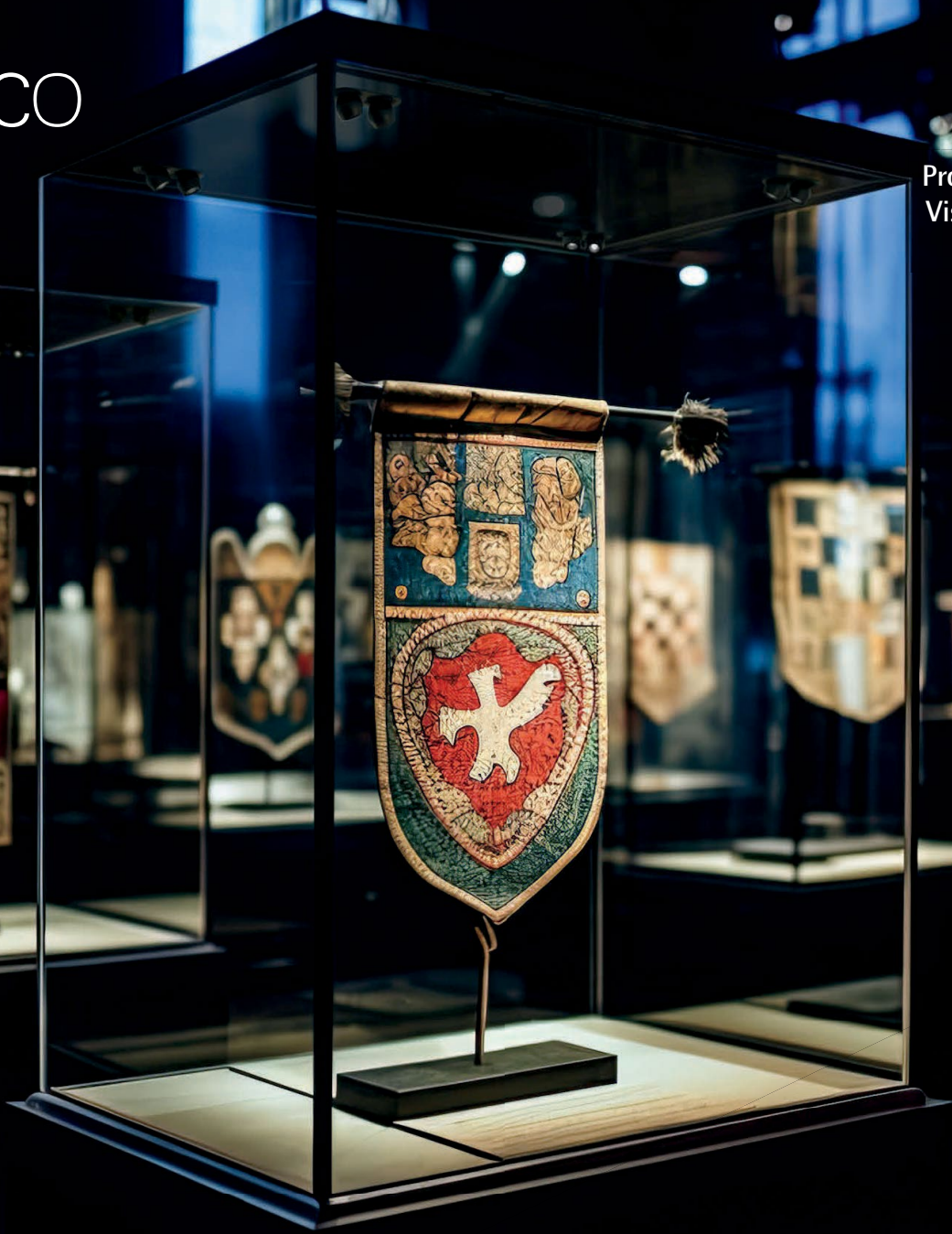
museums no longer fear a threat from technology, nor chase the trends established for virtual environments, but instead exploit technology as a tool for the real environment to unite visitors in a celebration of our shared humanity.

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1950

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1960

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1970

1980

1990

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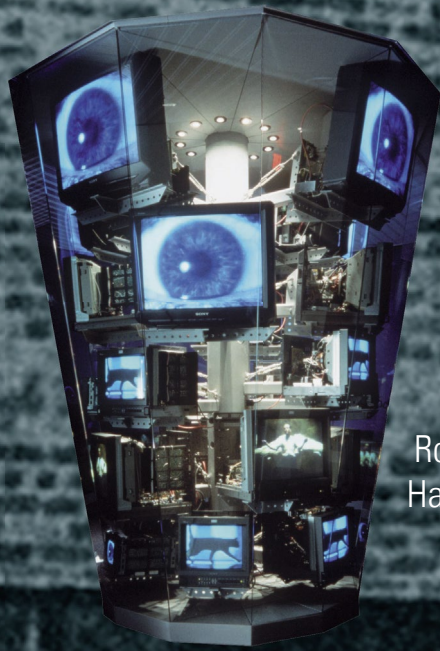
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1997
Janet Annenberg
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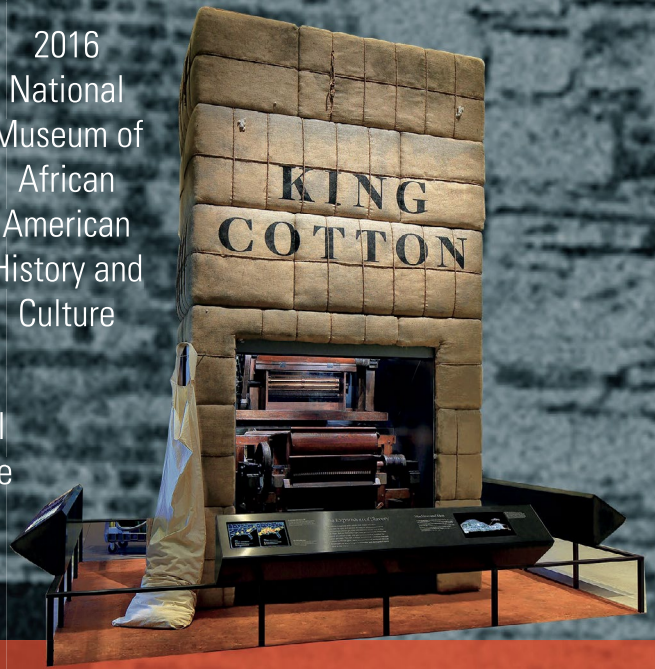
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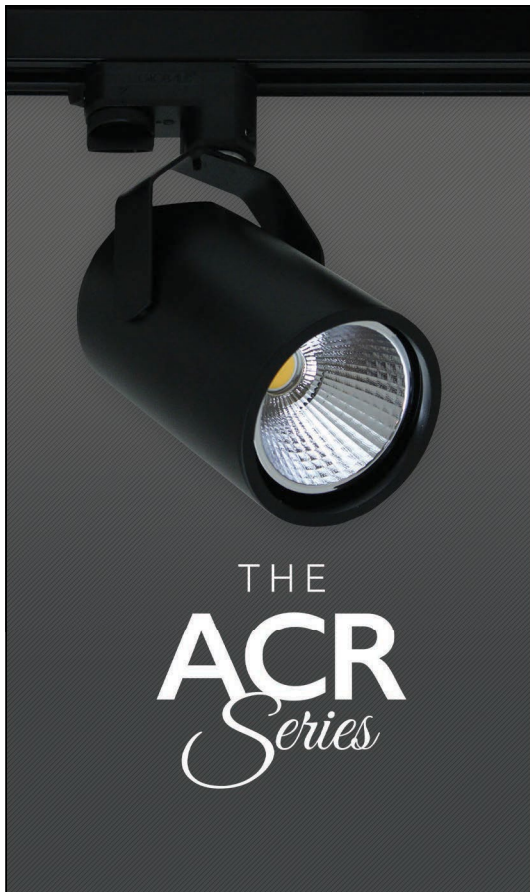
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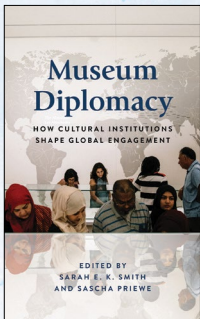
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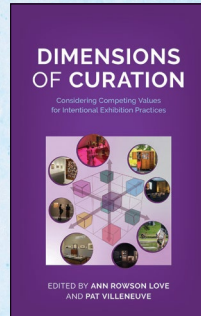
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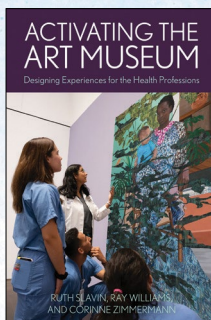
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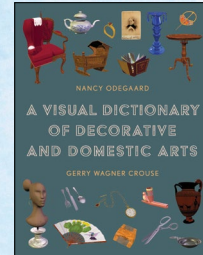
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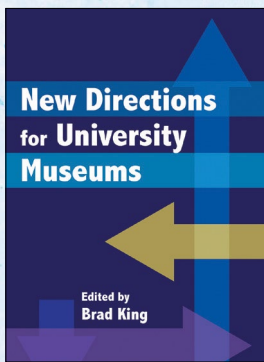
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at the **AAM Bookstore** at MuseumExpo

Friday

MAY 17TH



10:30-11:00AM
BRAD KING, EDITOR

This book helps university museum leaders to help them plan strategically in the context of the issues and needs of the 2020s by examining trends affecting them and directions in response to those forces.

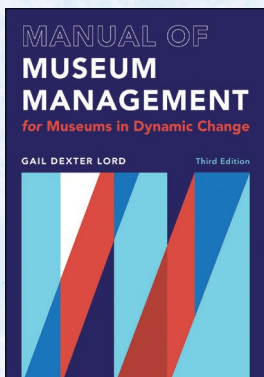


1-1:30 PM
TIMOTHY J. MCNEIL, AUTHOR

“Destined to become essential reading for anyone in the field!” —Merritt Price, former head of design, J. Paul Getty Museum

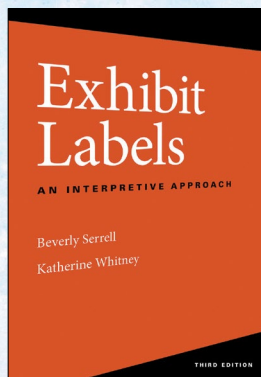
Saturday

MAY 18TH



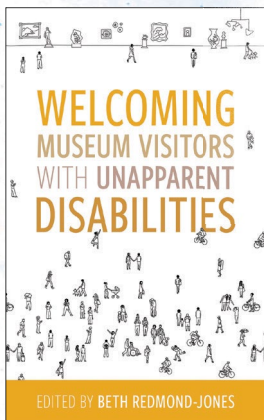
11:00 - 11:30AM
GAIL DEXTER LORD, AUTHOR

This book presents a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the principles of museum organization, the ways in which people work together to accomplish museum objectives, and the ways in which museums, large and small, can function most effectively.



4:30 - 5:00PM
BEVERLY SERRELL & KATHERINE WHITNEY, AUTHORS

This third edition to the classic guide to writing interpretive exhibit labels is updated to include new voices, current scholarship, and the unique issues the museum field is grappling with in the 21st century.



NOON - 12:30PM
BETH REDMOND-JONES, EDITOR

This book explores how international cultural organizations (i.e. museums, aquariums, art centers) serve individuals with mental health and neurodiverse challenges.



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A world of networking in the MuseumExpo at AAM 2024!



Friday



Saturday

AM 10:00 – 11:00 NeighborHub Meetups
10:10 – 11:20 Poster Talks

9:30 – 10:00 MuseumExpo Coffee Break

PM 12:30 – 1:30 NeighborHub Meetups
12:30 – 2:00 MuseumExpo Networking Reception
12:40 – 1:50 Poster Talks
4:20 – 5:20 NeighborHub Meetups
4:30 – 5:20 Poster Talks

12:30 – 1:30 NeighborHub Meetups
12:40 – 1:40 Poster Talks
4:20 – 5:20 NeighborHub Meetups
4:20 – 5:30 MuseumExpo Networking Happy Hour
4:30 – 5:20 Poster Talks

Book Signings

at AAM's Bookstore & Resource Center:

Renée Fleming, *Music and Mind: Harnessing the Arts for Health and Wellness*, and **Susan Magsamen**, *Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us*

Brad King, *New Directions for University Museums*

Timothy J. McNeil, *The Exhibition and Experience Design Handbook*

Monica Yunus, *Pop Up Pianos*

Gail Dexter Lord, *Manual of Museum Management: For Museums in Dynamic Change* (3rd ed.)

Beth Redmond-Jones, *Welcoming Museum Visitors with Unapparent Disabilities*

Dr. Jeremy Nobel, *Project Unlonely*

Chris Wilson, *The Master Plan: My Journey from Life in Prison to a Life of Purpose*

Beverly Serrell and **Katherine Whitney**, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (3rd ed.)

» Find the list of signing **schedule** and **locations**, subject to change: bit.ly/book-signings-aam2024

NeighborHub Meetups for:

- DEAI & Anti-racism
- Small Museums
- Historic Houses & Sites
- BIPOC Museum Professionals
- Emerging Museum Professionals
- LGBTQ+ Professionals
- Curatorial Practice & Collections Stewardship
- Education, Interpretation, and Public Programs
- Exhibitions, Media, & Tech
- Governance & Leadership
- Marketing, Comms, and PR
- Museum Studies
- Research, Evaluation, & Impact
- Volunteer & Community Engagement
- and more!

» For casual yet meaningful conversations and networking, drop by NeighborHubs **behind the Solutions Center** in the MuseumExpo! Find the **schedule**, subject to change: bit.ly/neighborhubs-aam2024

Posters & Poster Talks:

There will be **over 40 posters** on display during MuseumExpo open hours! Plus, check out some of the 10-minute **Poster Talks**.

» Find the list of **topics** and **talk times**, subject to change: bit.ly/posters-aam2024

and more!

Visit the **AAM Resource Center** in the MuseumExpo to meet the AAM team and learn more about AAM programs.


At the **Recharge Lounge**, take a break, charge your phone, and grab a latte (that doubles as a work of art) from BaristArt!

Striking A BALANCE



Visitors gather
in the garden at
Oakland Museum of
California's Friday
Nights.





The Oakland Museum of California has changed its financial decision-making to prioritize social cohesion.

By Nisha Gulati, Mirella Rangel, and Kim Ondreck Carim

During a strategic planning retreat

in 2023, an Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) trustee raised a hand to offer what they thought was missing from the draft mission, vision, values, and goal statements in OMCA's in-progress strategic plan: "financial sustainability," they said confidently. They explained that the museum's new and inspiring direction wasn't complete if we didn't explicitly state that we had the money to pay for it.

The concept of financial sustainability as a goal for nonprofits is so ingrained that it sounds like common sense. Organizations need recurring and reliable money to do their mission-related work over the long term.

But over the years, as we listened to staff perspectives on anti-racist practices and analyzed our failures, we began to suspect that our instinct to prioritize our financial sustainability was exhausting our resources without achieving the intended social impact. And as we lived through the tumult of the early 2020s, we wondered: Was the "sustainability" part of financial sustainability even possible in a world where accelerating change is one of our only constants? Had the words "financial sustainability" become, as one staff member observed, weaponized as an easy "no" to ideas leadership didn't want to engage with?

Inspired by our museum's clear social cohesion goals, we began to ask: What would shift if we

embraced our finances as connective tissue that drives social change across sectors and communities rather than as scarce resources to be balanced? What if we aimed beyond financial sustainability toward making financial decisions that were aligned with our values?

The new strategic plan would have to answer these questions, and we would need to significantly change our business plan. To do this, we needed to clearly articulate why we needed something other than financial sustainability as our guiding financial ethos. We would also need the board and staff to help us imagine how we could do this.

Healthy Systems and Liberation

Our strategic planning consulting team, the Colibrí Collaborative, suggested that we begin our planning process by listening to the community to better understand the desired future role for our museum along with perceptions of our current role. What we heard redirected our focus from defining ways our museum could be a leader toward embracing the critical behind-the-scenes role the museum plays in Oakland, the Bay Area, and California's network of cultural institutions. Our role as a critical social network, we heard, keeps our community members connected in divided times. We heard that OMCA is more than a museum. Community members told us they valued our garden as a public space to gather, and the museum's exhibitions and programs provide needed context and place for public dialogue.

With this feedback, the direction of OMCA's new financial ethos crystalized: prioritize our resources so that we can be a strong pillar in our community network and invest in fortifying the network's health. By focusing on our role inside of a healthy system, we were learning to practice liberation as defined by the Colibrí Collaborative: the ongoing process of accepting and appreciating everyone and everything around us, recognizing and acting in accordance with our individual gifts, valuing how we are each sacred, and honoring our kinship.

Learning from Our Past

The most obvious observations in hindsight are often the hardest to see clearly in the thick of things. Addressing declining city funding using data-driven

RESOURCES

Towards Liberation: A Guide for Reconnecting with a Culture of Liberation, Colibrí Collaborative
colibrícollaborative.com/towards-liberation

Diedra Barber and Maureen Benson, *Transmuting White Supremacy and Patriarchy*
transmutingwhitesupremacyandpatriarchy.com

Anne Wallestad, "The Four Principles of Purpose-Driven Board Leadership," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2021
ssir.org/articles/entry/the_four_principles_of_purpose_driven_board_leadership#

Gabes Torres, "Reclaiming Abundance Under Capitalism," *YES!* magazine, Oct. 26, 2022
yesmagazine.org/opinion/2022/10/26/capitalism-consumption-holidays-abundance

decision-making to increase other revenue sources was a major initiative in our previous strategic plan—a pretty standard strategy in the museum world. But when the pandemic gave us a chance to step back and see—specifically through the eyes of our anti-racist design teams—where putting financial sustainability on par with our social impact had landed us, we noticed a pattern of financial decision-making that was uplifting our economic independence but undermining our social impact goals and values:

- **We were prioritizing our organization’s financial health over our staff’s financial health.** We were paying staff at 90 percent of market value compared to similar roles at similarly sized museums in our geographic area because that was what we felt we could afford. In the name of preserving funds to create social cohesion in our communities, we were

expecting our staff—themselves members of those communities—to work at a discount.

- **We were prioritizing increasing revenue over providing economically sensitive access to our museum.** Our strategies to grow ticket and program revenues included decisions to eliminate or deemphasize discounted or free admission options.
- **At our signature fundraising event, we were effectively offering priority access to those who could compensate us for that access.** We celebrated our social impact work as a museum at an event whose audience received favorable accommodations tied to the increased amounts they paid for them.
- **We were prioritizing our portfolio’s return on investment over being mindful of our investment choices for our community.** Although we know that social cohesion is undermined by activities promoting firearms; the



Visitors sketch a live drawing session at Oakland Museum of California’s Thursday After Hours programming.

Christine Cueto

prison industrial complex; incarceration; and the exploration, production, and extraction of fossil fuels, we focused on what an investment returned financially rather than what it enabled socially.

These actions were firmly grounded in putting our financial sustainability on par with our social impact—but they also had us acting in direct conflict with our stated values and as if OMCA was the only entity whose economics mattered. So we experimented with flipping the equation. What would happen if we made financial decisions using our values, vision, mission, and social impact framework to help us achieve our intended social cohesion outcomes?

- **We started paying our staff at 100 percent of market value and committed to annual increases at least in line with annual cost of living increases.** After making this commitment, we asked a donor to support the first three years of this new compensation philosophy, allowing us time to find more donors inspired to support our commitment to our staff's financial wellbeing.
- **We shifted our focus to attendance rather than revenue.** Practically, this means that every visitor to our campus, ticketed or unticketed, full price or discounted, is as valuable as any other visitor. This perspective on visitors is critical to achieving our social impact.
- **We prioritized access.** OMCA's signature fundraising event is now priced on a sliding scale and includes a free option, democratizing event attendance. Now we can focus on people we can serve rather than only being accessible to those who can pay. Our data analysis indicates this decision has not decreased revenue.
- **We redefined our investment portfolio's purposes and priorities to be a "both/and" with respect to return on investment and fostering social cohesion.** We do not expect our portfolio to reach alignment with our new priorities quickly. We recognize that this process is best done slowly, methodically, and

with great intention. We are confident that seeing our investment portfolio as more than a vehicle for our own benefit will positively affect the community.

We learned that when we grounded financial decision-making in our most sacred values, we emerged stronger. And when we used our resources to strengthen our network and connection with the community, we were able to fund those commitments through a passionate community of supporters who share our values.

Through our work with the Colibrí Collaborative, we now see that with these changes, we are invoking a liberatory perspective, inspired by the Indigenous principle of abundance from interconnectedness and reciprocity rather than through scarcity, competition, and individualism. We also see parallels to our ethos in the work of climate justice. When the network is healthy, we all can have what we need.

Reaching Financial Authenticity

Our board, like most, takes its fiduciary and governance roles seriously. OMCA has run deficit budgets in both pre- and post-COVID years. Our trustees' concerns about our ability to close those deficits are real. How could we help them become comfortable with what seemed like a leap of faith: invest in the health of the ecosystem and somehow, some way, that ecosystem will reap bigger rewards for all of its components the healthier it gets?

After the board retreat where financial sustainability as a goal was noted as missing, OMCA worked with the Colibrí Collaborative and our strategic planning financial consultants, BDO FMA, to make the change process around financial decision-making more explicit and transparent. Collectively, we defined the term "financial sustainability" to name a decision-making ethos driven by the need for a financially stable institution for the long term.

We differentiate this from "financial integrity," an alternative financial decision-making ethos in which our financial decisions are primarily driven by how we embody our mission, vision, and values, and how we uplift our people and our existing strengths. We have explicitly stated that financial integrity is the lens



Crowds enjoy a live music performance at Oakland Museum of California's Friday Nights.

through which we want to re-envision our business plan to support our new strategic plan.

We also defined an aspirational state beyond financial integrity that we call “financial authenticity,” in which our financial decisions will be primarily driven by how our organizational strengths lead to collective actions that contribute to a greater good. The continuum from financial sustainability to financial integrity to financial authenticity is parallel to the continuum of independence to interdependence to collectivism.

Once we provided these definitions and walked trustees through how decision-making based on financial sustainability had led to misalignment with our organizational values and social impact goals, as originally observed by our anti-racist design teams, we began to see heads nod. We gathered feedback that endorsed a business model centered on inviting more people in rather than extracting their dollars. We agreed that contributed revenue from donors who value that business model is a critical piece of OMCA’s financial puzzle. Together, we reached an understanding that organizational financial health is always a baseline expectation and, simultaneously, that we will evolve to embrace financial sustainability as a consequence rather than a driver of wellbeing at OMCA and in our interconnected communities.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

The evolution of thinking described here occurred organically over more than five years. Many brilliant people contributed to initiatives driven by an

emphasis on financial sustainability; they were doing what they were asked to do at the time, and they were doing it well. The path that led us away from those initiatives was paved in part by their ideas and energy and, especially and oddly enough, their successes.

Today, we are on a learning journey toward living our values, be it through financial or other types of decision-making. We don’t claim to have it figured out. As an example, currently, our staff and leadership are grappling with how we claim to embody our values and social impact framework externally and how we choose to live them internally in the context of a public statement about Palestine.

Such healthy discussions and differences in perspective will continue both internally and externally. This is what happens when an organization uses inquiry, transparency, and vulnerability as fuel for progress toward social cohesion. The liberatory financial ethos continuum we’ve described as an outcome of our work is only one step on this long journey.

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Mirella Rangel is co-founder and collaborator at the Colibrí Collaborative; reach her at mirella@colibricollaborative.com. **Kim Ondreck Carim** is OMCA’s Chief Financial Officer; reach her at kcarim@museumca.org.

Partnering FOR COMMUNITY HEALING AND CHANGE

Museums can play a role in destigmatizing addiction disorder.

By Xoe Fiss and Patty Bode





All photos courtesy of Patty Bode

What inspires a complete stranger to engage in the destigmatization of addiction disorder with paint, embroidery, glue, and drawing amid hundreds of other strangers? It is safe to assume that the majority of the attendees at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center (JMKAC) Midsummer Festival of the Arts in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, did not wake up that July morning last year planning to contemplate the social ramifications of addiction disorder. Yet, we welcomed over 700 participants into the art-making tent throughout the two-day festival. We greeted visitors with these words:

Welcome to the Remember Love Recovery Project. We are named for this design. [At this point, we handed out stickers and flyers with the design, here on p. 39.] It says, “Remember Love.” The design was created by Patty Bode’s son, Ryan. Tragically, his life ended due to an accidental heroin overdose and now the Remember Love Recovery Project is using art and education to foster human connection to destigmatize addiction disorder, so people get the help they need. We invite you to make Recovery Flags, into which you may

From left: Patty Bode welcomes a family into the art-making tent at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center’s 2023 Midsummer Festival of the Arts and introduces the Remember Love Recovery Project. Participants created more than 550 recovery flags at the event.



pour compassion, hopes, concerns, wishes, questions, care, and your own inspiration. Use images, words, or abstraction to paint, glue, and draw with all the free materials provided here. You may take your flag home with you, or you may donate it to our collection, which we hope to bring to the National Mall in Washington, DC, within the next two years to help raise national awareness about the need to address substance use disorder in the US.

If young children were present, we delivered the same welcome announcement, but we discreetly pointed to the sentence on the flyer about Ryan's death, allowing families to choose how, and if, to address that with their group. We concluded our

welcome message by pointing to our partner organization, Lighthouse Recovery Community Center, strategically located next to our entry table, where participants could learn from experts about how Narcan (naloxone) saves lives, get free naloxone, and find information on recovery services.

It is remarkable that hundreds of people, who likely came to the festival to enjoy a sunny summer day with live music, food trucks, and shopping at the artisans' booths, chose to enter our tent, visit the Lighthouse resources, and sit down and immerse themselves in the goal of destigmatizing addiction disorder. Many stayed for hours working on their flags.

Museums are typically not therapeutic or clinical sites. But museum spaces can be used to connect with the recovery community, including people who are on a recovery journey, those working in clinical care facilities, and families and friends affected by loved ones' substance use disorder. Many museums are prioritizing inclusivity and community education, and using their space to destigmatize addiction disorder aligns with those goals. Here, we share our story of a partnership among a museum, a community arts activist-educator, and centers of recovery health services that illustrates one model that has yielded success.

Museums as Third Spaces

Though each museum has a unique mission and vision, all seek to facilitate human connection. The JMKAC was motivated to align with Remember Love Recovery Project's mission due to current tragedies: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports more than 110,000 overdose deaths in the US in each of the past three years (2021–2023). Fentanyl overdose is the leading cause of death for Americans ages 18–45.

Do museums turn away from these issues or attempt to broaden perspectives and promote social action? Should museum spaces be used to destigmatize addiction disorder and support the recovery community? When US society is reeling from more than 110,000 overdose deaths per year, the tragedy extends beyond the individuals lost, affecting their loved ones and caregivers. Our shared humanity is diminished. Our commitment to expanding our understanding of the human condition urges us to act.

RESOURCES

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

This is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

About calling 988

People can call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org, for themselves or if they are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support. 988 offers 24/7 access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing mental-health-related distress.

Arts Strategies for Addressing the Opioid Crisis: Examining the Evidence, Key Findings from a Literature Review and Program Scan on the Arts, Pain Management, and Substance Use Disorder, National Endowment for the Arts, 2020
arts.gov/sites/default/files/Arts-Strategies-Opioid-Crisis.pdf

Love in the Time of Fentanyl, Colin Askey (director), 2023

pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/love-in-the-time-of-fentanyl/

Remember Love Recovery Project

rememberloverecovery.org

social media: [@rememberloverecovery](https://twitter.com/rememberloverecovery)

Large community events like JMKAC's Midsummer Festival of the Arts provide a unique opportunity to challenge the norms of museum education. It is common museum practice to separate difficult and potentially controversial current events

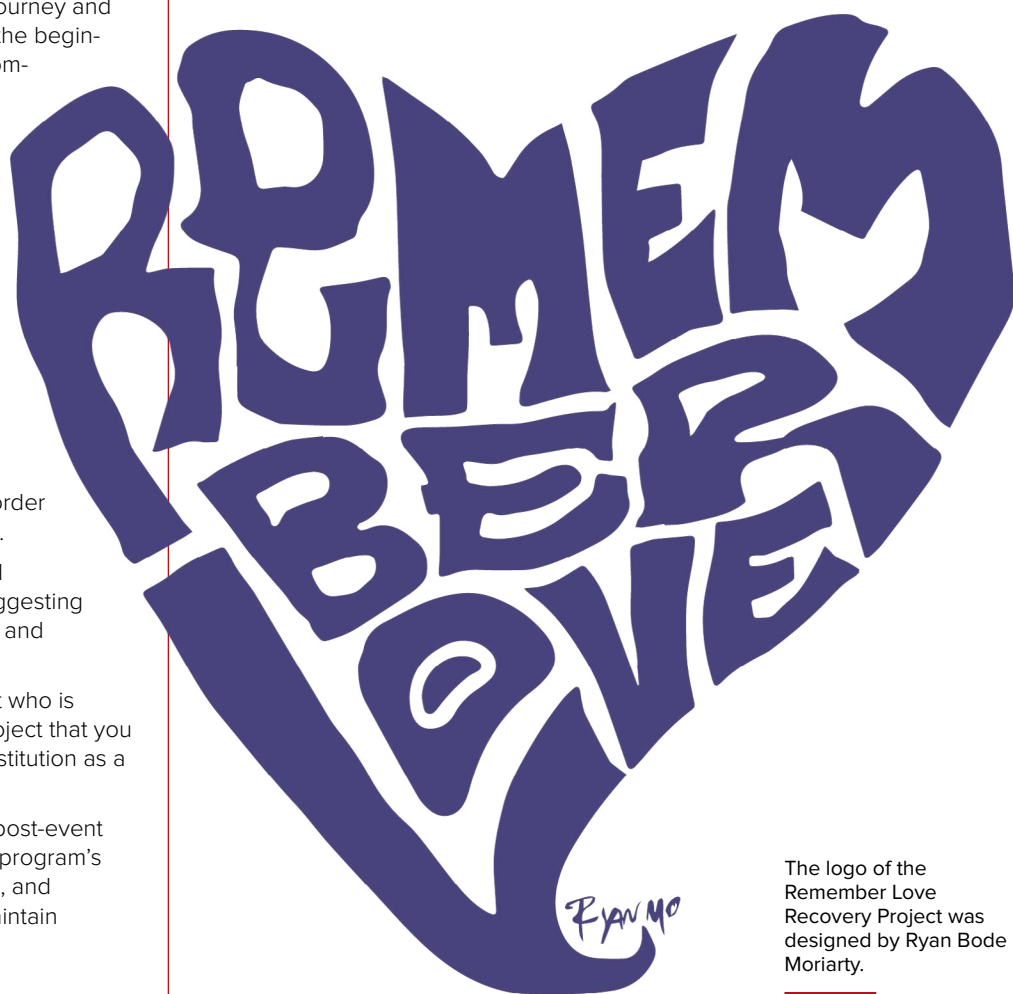
from programming for multigenerational audiences. Museums delicately balance multiple community needs while ensuring groups with young children feel welcome in gallery spaces. These are essential objectives for building new audiences and captivating children's attention. However, to grow a museum's education possibilities, we must view the museum as a third space in the community rather than a strictly cultural destination.

This goal does not negate the need for museum literacy skills; rather, it adds a layer of community engagement where possible. At a summer festival, visitors connect with local artists, listen to music, enjoy food together, and relax outdoors. These elements break down typical museum barriers and signal to visitors who may not think of the museum

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP TIPS

Museums seeking to destigmatize addiction disorder and support the recovery community must collaborate with local professionals with therapeutic and clinical expertise. In our case, we partnered with the recovery community to learn from those on the recovery journey and their care providers. Starting from the beginning with all collaborators, we recommend these actions:

- Reach out to organizations serving the recovery community and learn about their needs, struggles, and capacity to partner or contribute. Find out how the museum can be supportive.
- Dedicate your efforts to a mutually beneficial mindset. Affirm the knowledge and expertise of all partners in order to learn from and with them.
- Center reciprocal goals and community needs when suggesting possible program concepts and dates.
- Seek out a community artist who is facilitating a road-tested project that you can bring to your cultural institution as a starting point.
- Invite all collaborators to a post-event evaluation to reflect on the program's outcomes, gather feedback, and brainstorm next steps to maintain momentum.



The logo of the Remember Love Recovery Project was designed by Ryan Bode Moriarty.



A participant's recovery flag in felt collage.

as a space that affirms that they are seen and welcome. For visitors who already feel comfortable in museum spaces, such events can emphasize that this is a space to learn about and support our community together. Authentic interactions that connect the audience with meaning-making can cultivate that third space of human connection.

From Concept to Action

In February 2023, when Xoe Fiss was the education program director at JMKAC, the institution screened the documentary *Love in the Time of Fentanyl*, directed by Colin Askey. Fiss attended the screening with her partner, Ben, who is in recovery and pursuing a career in public health and addiction support services. After the film, staff from Lighthouse Recovery Community Center facilitated a Narcan training.

Fiss's personal connection and newfound understanding about supporting individuals in recovery prompted her to consider how a museum can serve the recovery community by incorporating awareness of addiction disorder into programming for all visitors. The idea continued to percolate when she attended the National Art Education Association conference in New York in April 2023. There she attended Patty Bode's session about the Remember Love Recovery Project, which she founded to raise awareness, organize activism, and provide accurate information related to addiction disorder and recovery through arts and education. Bode's project was the call to action Fiss was seeking, and she eagerly returned to Sheboygan to start supporting the recovery community in future programs.

During an initial call with Bode, the JMKAC programming team brainstormed how Bode's work could connect to the art center's future initiatives. Nothing concrete was decided on the call, but a few weeks later, Fiss serendipitously started a conversation with a participant at a drop-in workshop at JMKAC. The visitor had been at the program for about an hour, longer than the 30 minutes most other participants were spending there. The programming team at JMKAC practices relationship building with visitors who drop in to its community studio—every conversation is an opportunity to understand how to better serve visitors. Fiss asked her if she'd been to the museum before. She said she hadn't, and Fiss asked what made her want to attend this program today.

The visitor shared that she was a patient in the day program for addiction disorder at a local mental health services organization. She found it difficult to find weekend activities in Wisconsin that did not revolve around drinking alcohol, and she was

interested in free activities to which she could invite a friend to help hold her accountable. This reconfirmed Fiss's certainty that she needed to advocate for the Remember Love Recovery Project message and art-making at a large JMKAC program—the Midsummer Festival of the Arts.

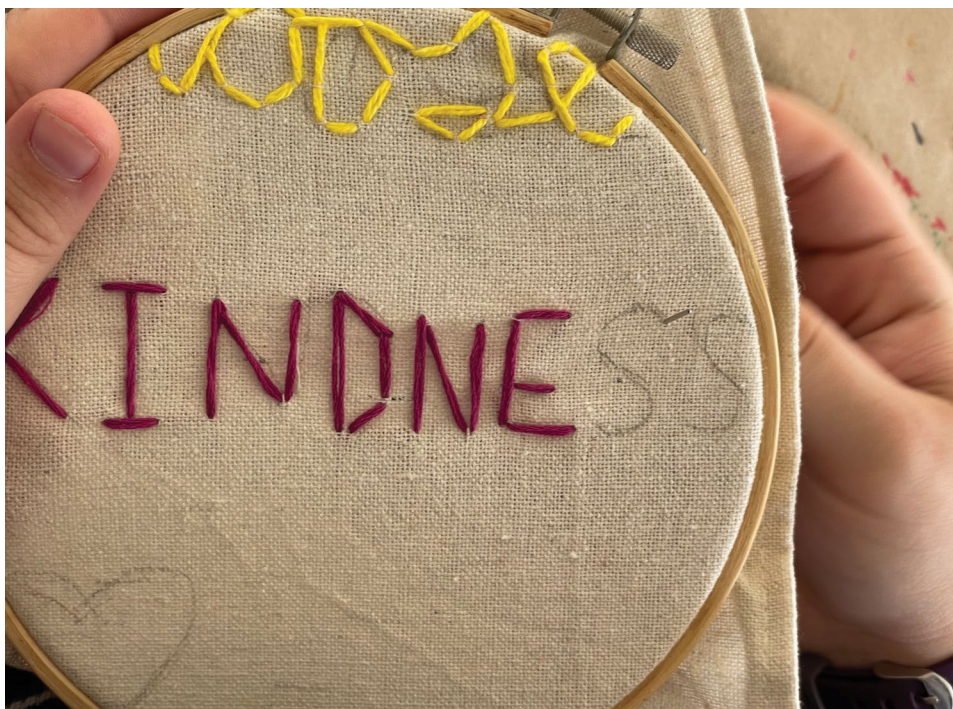
At the festival, the community workshop tent provided space for about 80 people to comfortably sit together and work on recovery flags. Some individuals chose to create flags on their own, while many multigenerational groups collaborated. We provided materials, such as paint, assorted fabric, markers, and stitching materials. When people finished their flags, Bode invited them to take their flag home, share it with someone in their life, or donate it to the Remember Love Recovery Project collection, with the hope of one day displaying them on the National Mall. Those who chose to leave their flag could clip it to clotheslines along the walls of the tent. We were struck by how grateful people were to have an opportunity to help destigmatize addiction disorder.

Rogers Behavioral Health, a mental health and addiction treatment center, stayed in contact with the Remember Love Recovery Project in the months after JMKAC brought Bode to Sheboygan for the event. The two groups are planning more art-making workshops in the future.

JMKAC continues public programming for social change. For example, in February, it hosted a screening of the 2013 documentary *The Anonymous People* and subsequent discussion and activities about changing the addiction conversation from problems to solutions. This event was presented in partnership with Lighthouse Recovery Community Center, Mental Health America Lakeshore, and MC Koke, a local advocate for the recovery community.

How might your museum foster healing and wellbeing in your community? We hope that this example of leveraging one museum's influence through a public summer event and meaningful community partnerships may provide a model for your community programming.

Xoe Fiss, now the Director of Youth & Family Programs at Milwaukee Art Museum, is looking forward to building on these strategies through the dynamic programs and resources for multigenerational audiences; reach her at xoe.fiss@mam.org. **Patty Bode** continues to bring the Remember Love Recovery Project to arts festivals, museums, prisons, universities, high schools, recovery communities, shelters for the unhoused, and more spaces across the US; reach her at patty.bode@gmail.com.



A participant's recovery flag in embroidery.





Creating RESTORATIVE MOMENTS

Woodland Park Zoo's Hope & Healing offers uplifting community experiences for people facing life-altering challenges.

By Lauren Carroll-Bolger

A child stared at their tablet's Zoom screen engrossed in the actions of a small penguin chick waddling around the rocky outdoor habitat at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington.

The child, along with others at a local children's hospital, had just voted on this new penguin chick's name. When the winning name was announced—

Yolanda—the child used American Sign Language to say “I love you” to the penguin. The collective hearts of the participating zoo staff and child's care team melted.

The child, a long-term patient at the local children's hospital, is not able to visit the zoo in person. While they are nonverbal, they found a way to clearly communicate and share the emotional connection and bond they formed with Yolanda.

Nature and animal encounters are proven restorative or bonding experiences for people and can have many positive effects on health and wellbeing. As an urban oasis, the zoo offers 92 acres of green space and a variety of animals—from the tiniest arthropods to the enormous rhino, Glenn. Yet, for individuals facing ability, cultural, economic, or geographic barriers, the zoo has not always been accessible. We have sought to address these barriers through an extensive Community Access Program (CAP) in which the zoo partners with hundreds of human-service organizations across our region to annually provide 100,000 free tickets along with discounted food and virtual experiences. Even with CAP assistance, however, a zoo visit is still out of reach for some members of our

From left: MNStudio/Alamy Stock Photo; Jeremy Dwyer-Lindgren/Woodland Park Zoo

community who face ability and cultural barriers. For these individuals, such as the child who helped name Yolanda, we created Hope & Healing, a partnership with community organizations that helps make a zoo visit, with its joyful animal and nature experiences, possible.

What We Offer

Hope & Healing works with eight partners serving audiences facing ability and cultural barriers, including newly settled refugees, LGBTQIA+ youth, children in long-term hospital care, families who lost a child, tribe social services and tribal foster children, and children receiving the state's most intensive behavioral and mental health care through the Children's Long-Term Inpatient Program. With a small but growing number of partners, we build close relationships with intentionality and customize an experience at the zoo that best serves the individual's needs.

Depending on the needs of the audience, Hope & Healing experiences can be one-time, intimate family visits; semi-regular virtual or in-person small group tours; or large community experiences on zoo grounds. The Journey Program, a bereavement service through Seattle Children's Hospital for families who have lost a child, is one of our Hope & Healing partners. Many of the families in the Journey Program previously visited the zoo with their late child. Returning to this space—even for a joyful experience with their surviving child—can be too overwhelming and emotional for these families.

Beyond free CAP tickets, Hope & Healing provides a customized experience and support specific to the needs and emotional barriers of these families to provide a restorative and healing visit with animals and nature. With Journey Program staff, we co-design an annual family picnic for more than 150 individuals that includes animal encounters, games, and art projects memorializing their family.

"These moments mean the world and really do help ease our grief for an afternoon," one Journey family told us after the visit. "It is so special that a large organization like the zoo takes the time to give back to families walking such a difficult road of loss."

For the children's hospital, we offer ongoing experiences for children who can't leave the facility due to

their need for long-term isolation. These children can participate in a monthly 30-minute Zoom call to meet an animal or two and learn from the keeper about the animals' personality and characteristics. For a brief moment, these children can experience the respite and joy of a zoo visit.

In celebration of Thanksgiving, during one of the regular Zoom experiences at the children's hospital, the children explored the diets of tree kangaroos and met Elanna and Finni, two of our forest-dwelling tree kangaroos. Starting at the zoo's commissary, the children engaged with our staff while they prepared the food for the tree kangaroos. The kids were able to "pack their own food" for the tree kangaroos using craft kits our commissary team caringly created for them containing detailed paper versions of corn, green bananas, rainbow chard, and other tasty vegetables the tree kangaroos love. After their virtual visit with the commissary, the children got to see Elanna and Finni up close over Zoom as they enjoyed the food that was prepared for them. The kids even pretended to feed Elanna and Finni some shared favorites, like spinach.

It was through another regular Zoom call that the kids had the rare opportunity to name penguin chicks, which formed a lasting bond between the children and the penguins. For the child who was able to name penguin chick Yolanda, this opportunity gave them hope that they would become well enough to leave the hospital and meet Yolanda in person. The child wrote a letter to our penguin keepers to share this goal and the emotional connection they have with Yolanda.

We are creative in our offerings, utilizing the assets the zoo has readily available and what is included in our base operating budget, such as the free admission tickets provided through CAP, animal encounters, private tours, carousel rides, naming opportunities, and much more. Tapping into this creativity, we also partner with Make-A-Wish to offer semi-regular visits for Wish children to keep their spirits up while they are waiting for their "big wish." We've also granted big wishes, including being an animal keeper for a day.

In the spring of 2023, Make-A-Wish approached the zoo about a child who wished for camera equipment to ask if we could host this child as they received their gift. We were happy to accommodate them. On the day, the child was welcomed to the

zoo by a cheering tunnel of zoo staff and volunteers. They then fed a penguin before receiving their new camera equipment. Accompanied by our on-staff photographer, the child then went on a tour of the zoo, taking pictures of animals and nature with their new camera. The day concluded with a rhino feeding for the child and their family. While a zoo visit was not the child's primary wish, we were able to host the wish experience and provide an unforgettable, uplifting experience for the child and their family.

What Can You Do?

Beyond the forested green space of Woodland Park Zoo, other museums and zoos can have a similar impact on their community, especially for audiences

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

We have many anecdotes about the uplifting experiences we offer through Hope & Healing, but due to the sensitivity of the populations we serve, we are careful about the data we collect and our evaluation methods. These experiences are meant to be joyful and uplifting, and we do not want to take away from the positivity by creating a burden of answering questions and participating in surveys afterward. Therefore, we primarily rely on internal staff observations and informal and survey feedback from the partner organization. We are always listening to our partners' needs and evolving these experiences to best serve their constituencies.

The need for Hope & Healing in our community surpasses the capacity of our team of two. Fortunately, by maximizing available resources without incurring additional costs, we have encountered minimal financial barriers to implementation. Instead, this work has attracted additional financial support, enabling us to enhance accessibility for our participants by, for example, providing language interpreters and upgrading technology for our Zoom experiences.

in need of a recharge. Visitors already see us as spaces for a contemplative and restorative experience.

Employing the Hope & Healing framework, organizations can build on this already restorative environment to create uplifting experiences for community members most in need.

The Hope & Healing framework has three key components: audience, assets, and approach. First, organizations should identify the target audience they are attempting to reach. Looking at your community, are there individuals with significant life challenges who face barriers to attending your institution and could benefit from an uplifting and restorative experience?

Once you have an idea of the audience you would like to serve, consider what assets you can offer potential community partners already serving these groups. What is unique to your institution that could be joyful for your intended audience? Do you already offer behind-the-scenes tours and experiences that can make someone smile? How can you make a pre-existing experience, such as a tour, private and tailored for a specific audience? What would your intended audience connect with?

With a general idea of what is possible at your institution, you can then begin building a relationship with community partners, reaching out to learn more about their populations' needs and how you could work together to create an uplifting and healing experience for them. Consider what accessibility accommodations should be made, such as welcoming an immunocompromised individual before you open to the public.

If your institution makes the space for an offering like Hope & Healing, you will positively impact not only your community but your staff. Personally, Hope & Healing has brought me a level of personal fulfillment that I had not experienced in my other roles in the nonprofit field. Seeing a child's face light up when given the chance to name a penguin—and how special that moment was for the child's care team as well—is one memory I'll cherish for life.

Lauren Carroll-Bolger is Community Affairs Manager at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington. Reach her at Lauren.Carroll-Bolger@zoo.org.

Breath work and guided meditation through poetry are strategies Johns Hopkins School of Medicine students practice in a session on personal and professional wellness.





Supporting THOSE WHO GIVE CARE

The Baltimore Museum of Art has partnered with the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine to better prepare medical students.

By Susan Witmer Wolffe and Margaret S. Chisolm

Here's what we know: at least 40 years of research tells us that art museum and medical school partnerships can hone medical students' observation and verbal description skills and support growth in empathy, collaboration, tolerance for ambiguity, and appreciation of difference. In a field in which knowledge acquisition is frequently privileged over bedside manner, mastering these competencies is nonetheless necessary for patient-centered treatment. At their core, museum and medical school programs focus on building clinically relevant skills to improve the health and wellbeing of patients.

However, the medical students themselves—who are preparing to serve others in a field with high rates of exhaustion, depression, and anxiety—are too often

Susan Witmer Wolffe

not centered in these partnerships. They must make quick sense of symptoms in order to diagnose and treat or prevent disease while simultaneously dealing with increasing workloads. To be better doctors and provide more humanized care to their patients, medical students must consider their own wellbeing.

To tackle the crisis of burnout, health professions educators increasingly recognize the role that arts and humanities can play not only in the wellbeing of patients but also in the flourishing of medical students. Visual art, studio art, creative and reflective writing, film, and performing arts are increasingly incorporated into medical education. In fact, in 2017, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) began an initiative to promote greater integration of these fields in medical education.

In an effort to support this work, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) is one of a group of cultural partners in the Baltimore area working with the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine (JHUSOM) to prepare medical students to thrive personally and professionally. Over the past five years, the BMA and JHUSOM have partnered to pilot and offer medical students an elective course on human flourishing.

What the Course Entails

In partnership with Dr. Margaret S. Chisolm, Professor of Psychiatry and Behavior Sciences and of Medicine, and Director of the Paul McHugh Program

for Human Flourishing at JHUSOM, the BMA has supported an elective for up to 15 third- and fourth-year medical students called “Professional Identity Transformation.” The highly interactive four-week, full-time elective has four topics relevant to human flourishing—family, community, work and education, and self-care—each of which is explored for one week and at a different institution each day. Collaborators have included Johns Hopkins University Museums, Walters Art Museum, Cylburn Arboretum, Baltimore Mural Program sites, the American Visionary Art Museum, and more. Themes are introduced weekly at the BMA and investigated through artwork-based exercises that focus on a limited number of objects for an extended period of time. Following each exercise, students participate in a clinical translation debrief in which they reflect on what the activity asked of them and what they found to be personally and clinically relevant.

Facilitated by Chisolm, the course aims to facilitate student reflection on:

1. What it means to be human, to be a physician, and to lead a good life (for oneself and one’s patients).
2. Their sense of self in relation to their family, community, work, and education experiences.
3. The ways in which family, community, education, and work experiences offer opportunities



Art Museum-Based Health Professions Education Fellowship, Harvard Macy Institute
harvardmacy.org/courses/museum

Ruth Slavin, Ray Williams, and Corinne Zimmermann, *Activating the Art Museum: Designing Experiences for the Health Professions*, 2023

rowman.com/ISBN/9781538158548/Activating-the-Art-Museum-Designing-Experiences-for-the-Health-Professions

Harvard continuing medical education course on visual-thinking strategies

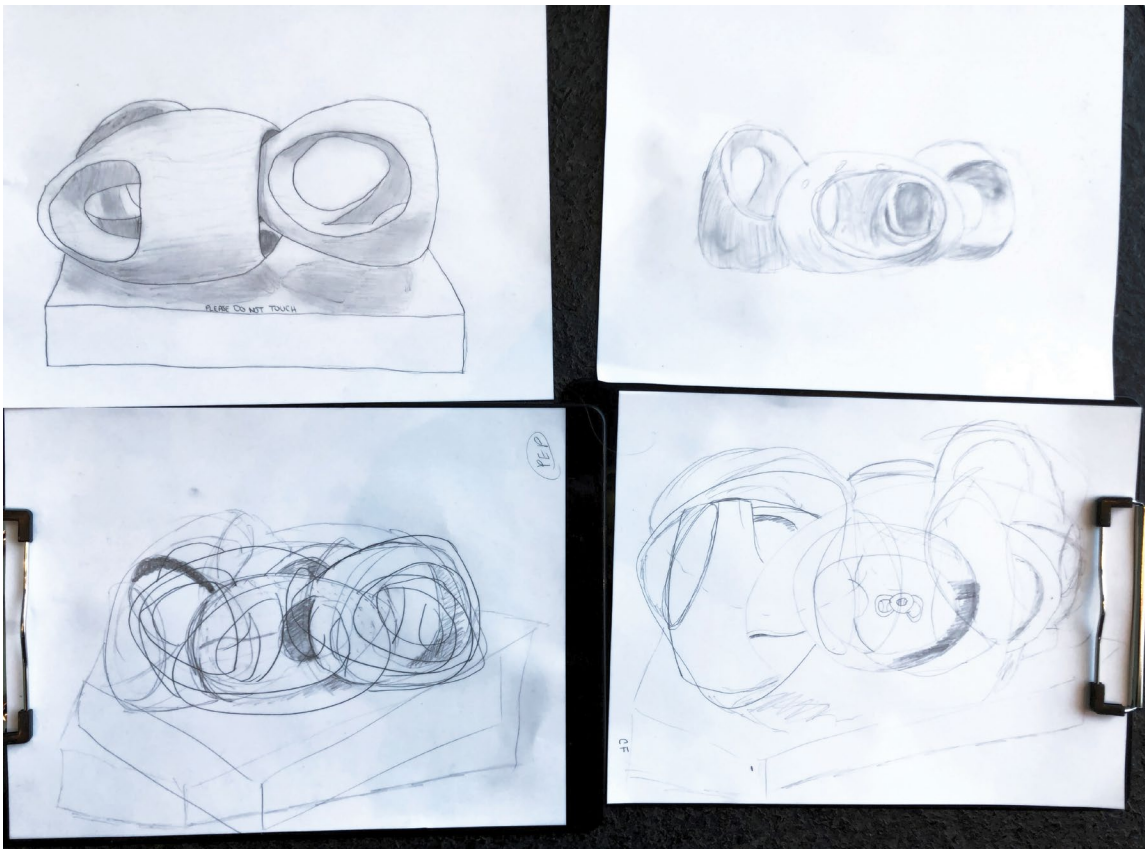
cmecatalog.hms.harvard.edu/training-our-eyes-minds-and-hearts-visual-thinking-strategies-health-care-professionals

Margaret S. Chisolm, Margot Kelly-Hedrick, and Scott M. Wright, “How Visual Arts-Based Education Can Promote Clinical Excellence,” *Academic Medicine*, 96(8), August 2021

pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33264111/

Ray Williams and Corinne Zimmermann, “Twelve Tips for Starting a Collaboration with an Art Museum,” *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 41(4), 2020

philpapers.org/rec/WILTTF-8



Reflection on the importance of multiple perspectives in clinical work begins with a comparison of student drawings.



for improving their life satisfaction and happiness, physical and mental health, character and virtue, meaning and purpose, and close social relationships.

4. The role of the arts and humanities in mastering skills, appreciating multiple perspectives, gaining personal insight, and supporting social advocacy.
5. The ways in which the arts and humanities can support self-care and wellbeing.

During the session dedicated to the theme of family, students may take part in a gallery activity in which a group of paintings, sculptures, and furniture are imagined as members of a family unit. Each student selects an artwork and, using assorted materials, creates a gift to support its emotional or physical wellbeing. During the debrief, students are asked to consider both how they assisted their anthropomorphized object in becoming a healthier participant in the family group and what they found personally and clinically relevant.

To explore the topic of community, students may create a shared definition of the term and list their interest groups—cultural, religious, and other. Then follows close looking, sketching, and discussion of D'mba, the “Great Mother” headdress from the Baga peoples of the Guinea coast. Over 4 feet tall and weighing 80 pounds, the massive headdress is understood as a representation of ideal female behavior and comportment and symbolizes specific cultural expectations created by the Baga people. Students return to their affinity group lists and discuss the expectations for proper behavior in each, and who or what enforces those expectations. It is not difficult to recognize the relevance of this exercise for students who are considering their roles in the medical school community.

The work and education theme may be explored through a drawing exercise in which students reflect on the importance of their individual contributions to a whole. Participants position themselves around a sculpture and sketch what they see. The drawings are then placed side by side—their similarities and

differences noted—and studied as parts of a collective understanding. Students then reflect on the relevance of multiple perspectives personally and in their clinical work.

The class may be asked to consider characteristics that make a good physician. For the “Draw What You Hear” exercise, student pairs create a blind drawing, in which one person faces a painting and describes it to their drawing partner, who can’t see the artwork or ask clarifying questions. Partners then switch roles and work with a different object. During reflection, participants are asked what their partners did well. High on the list are giving the big picture first and using language that is easily understood and moderately paced. Students are asked how careful word choice and pacing affect what others hear and how these lessons apply to the bedside and life outside medicine.

The final topic of the elective is flourishing, which focuses on personal wellness. The group participates in exercises to slow heartbeat and recenter themselves, activities that can be practiced in a medical setting or elsewhere. While focusing on breath work, the group is given prompts to create mindfulness drawings based on works of art. They also participate in body scans meant to draw awareness to areas of their bodies that hold tension.

The course is evaluated qualitatively, through reflective essays and structured interviews conducted after the course, and quantitatively, in surveys before and after the course that assess its clinical relevance. Results suggest that “Professional Identity Transformation” helps learners: (1) reconnect with individual characteristics and interests that had been neglected during medical education; (2) better appreciate other perspectives; (3) develop identities as physicians; and (4) engage in quiet reflection, renewing their sense of purpose. Students showed statistically significant increases in capacity for wonder and tolerance for ambiguity after the class.


The Future of Museum-Based Medical Education

Given the overwhelmingly positive response to the course, in early December 2023, JHU and Chisolm organized “Being Human: Envisioning the Future of Museum-Based Health Professions Education.” This

was a JHU-funded international convening of select health professions education leaders that, in partnership with the AAMC and Georgetown University’s Center for Innovation and Leadership in Education, sought to expand museum-based learning to humanize health care.

Participants included deans of medical and nursing schools, professors of medicine, chairs of medical departments, clinical professors, deans of medical education, leaders of international medical education organizations, museum education leaders, and more. The agenda featured seven interactive activities—including personal response tours, visual thinking strategies discussions, and creating group poems—in five Washington, DC, museums. Participants shared their experiences and discussed the challenges and solutions to integrating museum-based teaching in health professions education.

We know the rewards of museum-based learning to medical students, but how do museums benefit from these partnerships? One answer lies in creating connections with young adults through sustained, multi-session programs that support individual self-expression. In these programs, artworks stand in for human experience as opposed to being objects of study for which one could be penalized for not knowing the correct answer. By providing experiences that foster human flourishing and allow for reflection and decompression away from an often-stressful environment that can be regimented, exacting, and sometimes dehumanizing, we can create positive associations with museums and, in turn, cultivate the next generation of visitors and donors.


Susan Witmer Wolfe is Director of Gallery Learning in the Education and Interpretation Division at the Baltimore Museum of Art; reach her at swolffe@artbma.org. **Margaret S. Chisolm** is Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and of Medicine, and Director of the Paul McHugh Program for Human Flourishing at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine; reach her at mchisol1@jhmi.edu or on Instagram and X at @whole_patients.



Students explore community expectations and their enforcement through close looking and discussion of D'mba, a Baga female headdress.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERING WITH MUSEUM EDUCATORS

By Margaret S. Chisolm

The course discussed here began when I was selected to be among a group of 12 international health professions faculty to be design partners in the inaugural year (2019) of the Harvard Macy Institute Art Museum-based Health Professions Education Fellowship. A model of collaboration, the fellowship aims to cultivate health professions faculty expertise in museum-based pedagogical methods, encourage scholarship, and create a community dedicated to museum-based education for health professionals (MBE-HP). All fellows complete a project, which they develop with a local museum partner.

I reached out to two museum educators at the Baltimore Museum of Art actively engaged in gallery teaching. Together we designed a set of experiences for a four-week course to support medical students' flourishing. Planning sessions included gallery visits to consider activities, after which the museum educators developed outlines of possible course sessions. We tried these out with student volunteers who offered feedback before the course debuted in 2022.

Throughout the course, I share my own feedback—as well as students' comments and written reflections—with the museum educators, which allows us to improve the course. We have sustained our teaching partnership (most recently with a new course for pre-medical students) and collaborate on peer-reviewed publications about our work in hopes of bringing more visibility to the field of MBE-HP.



Probing GRIEF

Historic house museums can connect their physical spaces with personal experiences, including grief.

By Callie Hawkins and Rob DeHart

Historic house museums often focus on the experiences, routines, and challenges of the individuals and families who once lived there. However, few spaces are devoted to the most universal human experience—grief. Everyone at some point in their life will experience this emotion, which is not restricted by gender, ethnicity, or class.

Museum visitors expect to confront this feeling when they go to institutions such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and 9/11 Memorial and Museum. But understandably, most historic houses tend to emphasize the positive aspects of people's lives, showcasing accomplishments, watershed events, and entertaining stories. Visitors like uplifting and inspiring narratives, and, frankly, celebrating is a lot more fun than mourning.

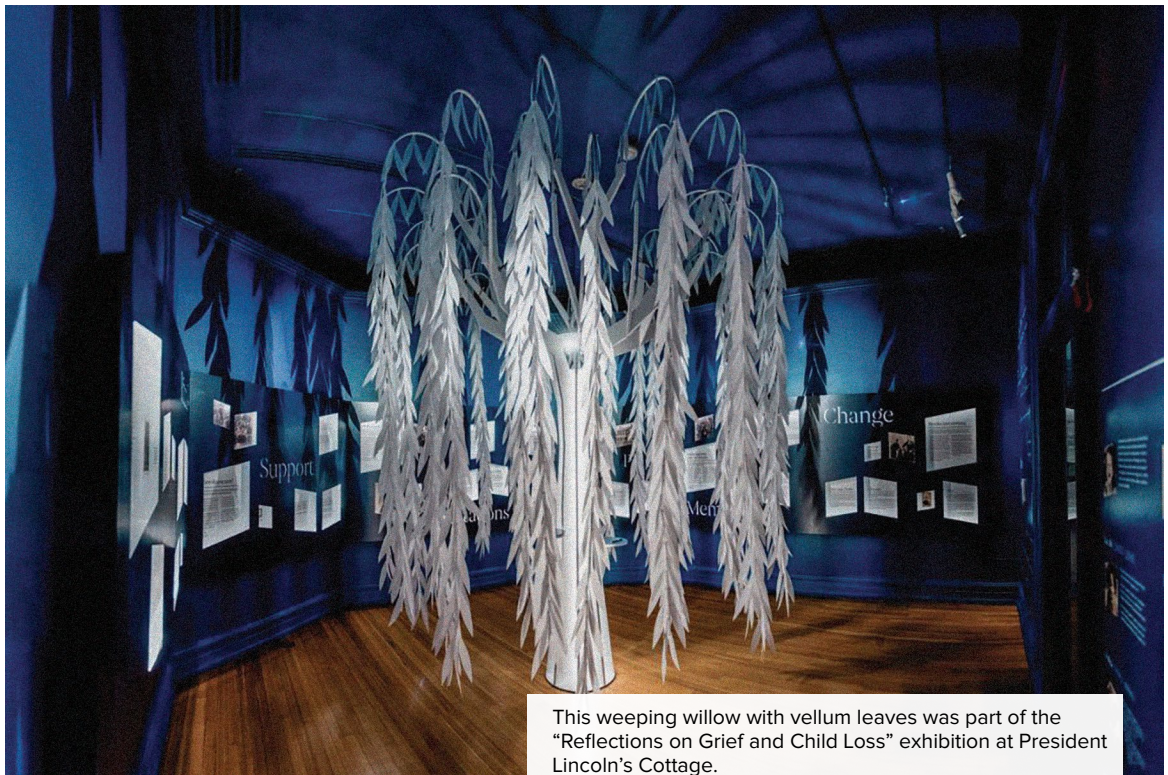
For both of us, after experiencing the devastating loss of a child, the stories of infant mortality and family separations at our respective historic sites—President Lincoln's Cottage (where Callie Hawkins works) and Tudor Place Historic House & Garden (where Rob DeHart is employed), both in Washington, DC—took on new meaning. Viewing

these stories through the lens of grief, it becomes evident that they were significant life events warranting more attention. Parents who lose children experience a trauma from which they never recover. We felt compelled to consider how our respective historic sites could create fuller and more nuanced portrayals of past lives by exploring the mental toll caused by grief. We also wondered how these stories could aid visitors with their own grief journeys, and how our institutions could become spaces for reflection and remembrance.

As a result of our efforts, our institutions have given grief research and interpretation a more prevalent role in their missions. These efforts demonstrate how incorporating the shared experience of grief into historic site interpretation can contribute to greater visitor engagement and healthier communities.

Grief and Love at President Lincoln's Cottage

In June of 1862, Abraham and Mary Lincoln departed the White House for a hilltop cottage located approximately 3 miles from the White House. The Civil War



This weeping willow with vellum leaves was part of the “Reflections on Grief and Child Loss” exhibition at President Lincoln’s Cottage.

“Because grief is universal, the cottage team hoped the exhibition would be meaningful to the tens of thousands of visitors who come to the cottage annually.”

was raging, and the family was desperate for a bit of quiet following the recent death of their beloved son, Willie. Willie was their second son to die from an illness in childhood—a death that rocked them to their core. Writing to a friend, Mary Lincoln said, “When we’re in sorrow, quiet is very necessary to us.”

Their impetus for moving to the cottage had been part of our tours since the cottage opened to the public in 2008, so “Reflections on Grief and Child Loss”—a special exhibition that opened in 2021—wasn’t a

departure for our team. However, our initial approach focused more on Willie’s death as a circumstance that led them to this place rather than a turning point for the family. We were failing to understand grief as a universal human emotion that every visitor who walks through our doors will experience if they love and live long enough.

In February 2018—on Abraham Lincoln’s 209th birthday—my beloved first child died. I was immediately struck by the invisible string connecting me to the

Photo by Chris Ferenzi

Lincolns in grief and love for my precious son. Present also was the deep suspicion that society's understanding of grief had evolved little since Mrs. Lincoln's time and that my own future depended on strong social and support networks that she didn't have.

At the outset of our project, we aimed to support griever by linking modern grieving families to each other, to the Lincolns, and to the cottage. To do this, we started with history to build an understanding of Abraham and Mary Lincoln as bereaved parents. Through their correspondence with friends and loved ones, we identified universal facets of grief—such as memories, expectations, and places that hold meaning—and built reflection questions around them.

We asked nine modern families who have lost children to reflect on those questions, and the exhibition weaves their responses with the Lincolns'. By connecting the Lincolns' experience to those of contemporary families whose children died inexplicably or because of illness, violence, and other tragic circumstances, we found commonalities and meaningful differences across time. And, while each experience represented in the exhibition is unique, these families are connected to each other, the Lincolns, and other bereaved families in their grief and their love for their children who have died.

Because grief is universal, the cottage team hoped the exhibition would be meaningful to the tens of thousands of visitors who come to the cottage annually. And we hoped that it might cultivate a new audience of bereaved people who have limited opportunities to share their experiences publicly in a society that is so grief averse.

Visitors not directly impacted by child death report that the exhibition's message is incredibly instructive for all types of grief and griever, specifically noting the efficacy of take-away cards that provide suggestions on how to best support grieving loved ones. One mother who shared her reflections on grief as part of the exhibition explained the importance of participating in this project: "When your child dies, you get no more moments where accomplishments are celebrated, or milestones achieved. With [my son] being part of this, I get to feel proud that he has a chance to make an impact, bring awareness, and potentially create change. ..."

To our great honor, bereaved parents, many of whom have traveled great distances to visit the exhibition, have chosen to spend the anniversary of their child's death or their birthday at the cottage, memorializing them on a vellum leaf that hangs on a large weeping willow at the center of the exhibition. As the tree fills up, the cottage team transcribes the messages from each leaf onto seed paper and ultimately will plant a grief garden on the cottage grounds.

We believe strongly that understanding the depth of the Lincolns' loss is crucial to helping our visitors understand the events that shaped them both into the people we remember today. With this exhibition, the cottage is holding space for the bereaved, just as it did for the Lincolns more than 150 years ago.

Restoring Grieving Parents at Tudor Place

Tudor Place Historic House & Garden preserves the stories of six generations of descendants of Martha Washington—the Peter family—and the enslaved and free people who lived and worked at this Georgetown landmark for nearly two centuries. Similar to other historic house museums of its time, the collection contains Victorian mourning jewelry, ephemera, and attire, and Tudor Place interpreted mourning traditions and funeral practices through the program "Death Comes to Tudor Place."

Following the death of my daughter in 2022, I felt more acutely the personal tragedies represented by these artifacts. Inspired by the work of Lincoln's Cottage, I sought ways to tell these stories more empathetically. These efforts made me deeply aware of what was absent.

The Peter family enslaved hundreds of individuals, and the site had never addressed the grief of enslaved parents who experienced child loss. Not only was infant mortality higher among enslaved mothers, partly due to having to work through pregnancies, but separation through sale was often the same as death because parents and children were rarely reunited. In these instances, there were no mourning brooches or memorial booklets to interpret. We had to find other means to restore this history to honor their grief.

For example, an enslaved woman at Tudor Place named Barbara Cole Williams gave birth to

twins Barbary and Hannah in 1829. Barbary died shortly after birth, while Hannah survived. Most of Barbara's family lived away from her on a Maryland plantation. Did she have to suffer the loss of her child without family support? Did her enslavers give her time to grieve? Without answers, we posed these questions to visitors.

We also turned to other sources to fill in gaps. In Solomon Northup's *12 Years a Slave* (published in 1853), the author recorded the story of a mother named Emily whose two small children were sold away from her. He described her as "inconsolable." One way she coped was by continuing to speak to her absent children as if they were still with her. We used this grief story to conjecture the emotions Barbara Cole Williams felt.

A greater sensitivity to the trauma associated with grief revealed new insights into old records at Tudor Place. A ledger entry in the site's archives from November 1796 notes the sale of parents Bob and Sall (surname was not recorded) and their children George and Ned. In the entry, Sall is labeled as "invalid," and George is listed as "insane." Looking back in time, we were able to assemble a potential explanation for these identifiers. Two of the couple's young daughters, Else and Kate, had been sold to another enslaver four months prior. As early as 1782, no member of this family was described in this manner. It is probable that Sall and George could not cope with the loss of Else and Kate. Instead of using the word "grief," their enslaver used "insane," much in the way it was applied to Mary Lincoln decades later. This story helped us discuss with visitors the stigma that was, and still is in some cases, attached to grief.

Another helpful resource for grief stories is cemeteries, but enslavers rarely recorded the final resting places of enslaved individuals. In addition, Black cemeteries, or Black sections of white cemeteries, were often neglected when African American communities were forced to move, often due to gentrification. As a result, many historic sites with a history of slavery possess scant resources on these burials.

Tudor Place is fortunate to collaborate with a historic Black cemetery located a few blocks from the site called Mount Zion/Female Union Band Society

Cemetery. Developers would have erased Mount Zion from the landscape if not for the efforts of the nonprofit Black Georgetown Foundation. At least one person enslaved at Tudor Place, Barbara Cole Williams, is interred there.

In the "Death Comes to Tudor Place" program, we highlighted a tradition with African roots that persisted in Black cemeteries in the US—the leaving of personal and tribute items, such as favorite dishes, cups, toys, and seashells, on the grave of the deceased. An example at Mount Zion is the grave of a 7-year-old girl named Nannie who died in 1856. For decades, contemporary cemetery visitors have revived this tradition at Nannie's grave, regularly depositing toys near her tombstone. Tudor Place displayed an image of the gravestone to illustrate this practice, and visitors were encouraged to visit the cemetery.

In tracing the narratives of grief within the walls of historic house museums, we not only illuminate the profound personal experiences of those who lived within them but also reveal the universal threads that bind us all. Through our efforts at President Lincoln's Cottage and Tudor Place Historic House & Garden, we have sought to honor the depths of human emotion, acknowledging grief as an intrinsic part of the human experience. By embracing these stories, we invite visitors to connect with the past on an empathetic level, fostering understanding, healing, and compassion. As we continue to explore the intricate tapestry of history, our shared experiences of grief can serve as a bridge, connecting us across time, culture, and circumstance, ultimately building a more empathetic and just society.


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The tombstone of "Nannie," who has since been identified as a free person of color named Francis Tenney, at Mt. Zion Cemetery in Washington, DC



Designing a WATERSHED EXPERIENCE

With its exhibition on water, the Ontario Museum of History and Art aims to educate and empower its community and address its wellbeing.

By Miriam Valle-Mancilla and Marissa Kucheck

**NATURE
SCOUT**



Visitors to the Ontario Museum of History & Art explore the habitat of native animals and plants in Southern California's ecosystem at the Nature Scout wall in the "Built on Water" exhibition.

Let's Play!

Welcome to the habitats of native animals and plants in Southern California's Mediterranean ecosystem. Explore the scenery and see how water plays an important role in our ecosystem and supports the habitats of plants and our furry neighbors.

Match the magnets to their habitat, can you correctly guess them all?

Hint: Use color, shape and fun facts about each plant or animal to help you match.

Photo by Watchara Phomicinda

As glaciers melt, wildfires ignite, and atmospheric rivers create catastrophic flooding events, it's clear that water management is an important piece of environmental conservation. Our societal well-being is intimately linked to our relationship with water—how we access it, how we ensure a safe clean supply, and how we care for this vital resource.

The issue of water has been on the mind of Californians for at least the past three decades. Southern California is one of the most studied places for water quality, and with a growing climate crisis that is deeply rooted in ever-decreasing water reserves worldwide, this local issue increasingly proves to be global.

When the Ontario Museum of History & Art decided to develop a new permanent exhibition on the topic of water in our region—“Built on Water: Ontario and Inland Southern California”—we focused on educating visitors about the intricate

After the museum was awarded a Museums for America grant from the Institute of Library and Museum Services in 2018, the five-year exhibition development began. Our curators diligently wove together research about the past, present, and future of water in the Ontario region, working collaboratively with local water agencies, archivists, teachers, tribal members, college students, and historians.

Through this research, the exhibition morphed from a narrative about the history of water infrastructure to a conversation about different forms of water management and the role of an individual citizen within the web of people who care for this valuable resource. The city of Ontario is situated above one of the largest groundwater recharge basins in the Inland Empire. Our team realized that this exhibition should encompass not only science and local history but also public health and community wellbeing.

“The idea for ‘Built on Water’ began in 2017, inspired by a grant-funded project to redesign the museum’s exterior landscape with native plants and water-saving features.”

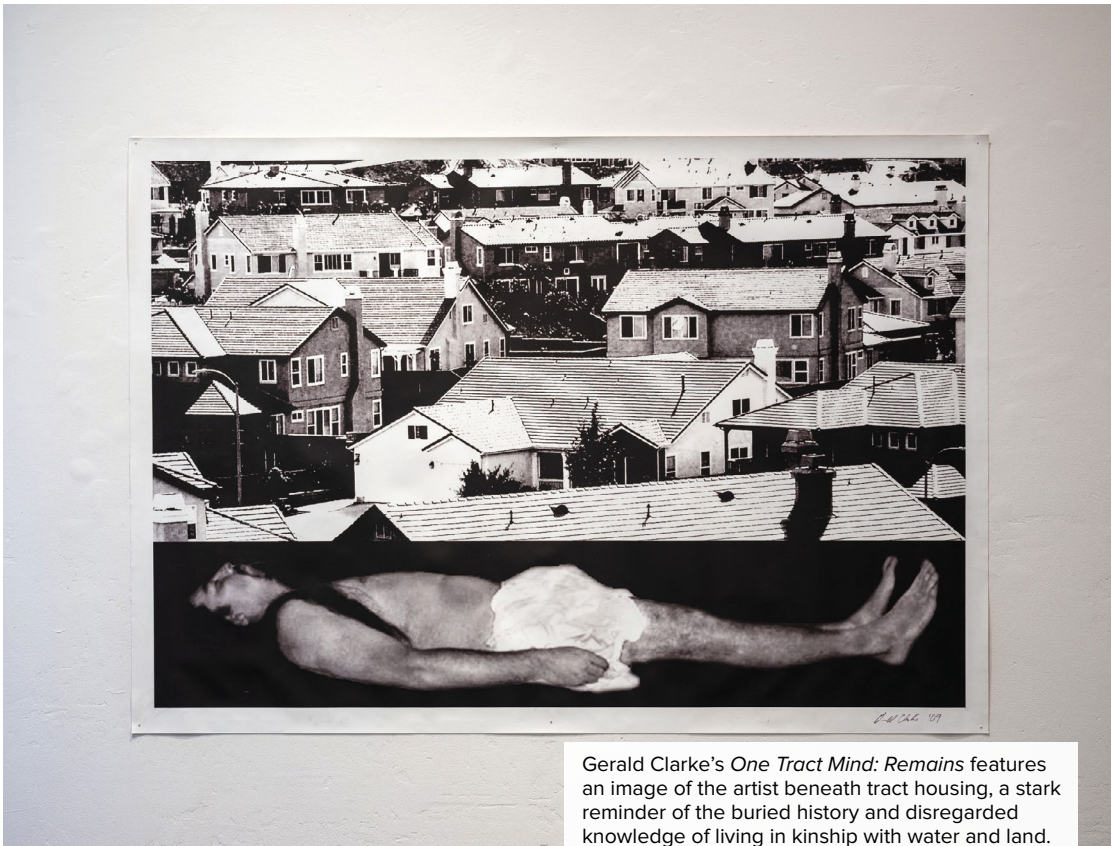
constellation of factors that govern access to water and its role in our environment, infrastructure, and community health. However, we were also intentional about designing the exhibition to help visitors think about water as a major factor in a community’s wellbeing.

Exhibition Background and Goals

The idea for “Built on Water” began in 2017, inspired by a grant-funded project to redesign the museum’s exterior landscape with native plants and water-saving features. At the time, curatorial staff realized there was a bigger story to tell about water and its importance in Ontario, a semi-arid city about 35 miles east of downtown Los Angeles in San Bernadino County.

As a municipal museum, our mission is to provide a space for residents and visitors that inspires creativity and preserves, interprets, and celebrates the history and cultural heritage of Ontario and the surrounding area. We serve a diverse community; Ontario’s population is approximately 185,000, with 70 percent of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latinx, 15.9 percent as white, 6.8 percent as Asian, 5.5 percent as Black or African American, and 0.1 percent as Native American. We knew that some people would visit specifically to view the exhibition, but the majority would be looking for something free to do on a weekend (the museum doesn’t charge admission) or to learn more about their city’s history.

Therefore, the 1,200-square-foot exhibition uses a variety of interpretive tools to share the story of water.



Gerald Clarke's *One Tract Mind: Remains* features an image of the artist beneath tract housing, a stark reminder of the buried history and disregarded knowledge of living in kinship with water and land.

‘CONDUIT’: A COMPLEMENTARY EXHIBITION

As a museum focused on local history and contemporary art, we wanted to develop an art exhibition that would complement “Built on Water.” That exhibition, “Conduit,” uncovers how the diversion of water has shaped the way we live through a critical examination of the tension between urban growth and the natural world.

The exhibition features seven Southern California artists: christy roberts berkowitz, Gerald Clarke, Noé Montes, Lorene Sisquoc, Samantha Morales Johnson, Stuart Palley, and Lauren Bon and Metabolic Studio and includes drawing, photography, sculpture, and mixed-media installations. The artists investigate wide-ranging topics, including the relationship between colonization, the erasure of Indigenous people, and urbanization; recent environmental disasters; and speculative ecologies.

For example, roberts berkowitz’s installation of charcoal drawings, *Sacred Ground: A Garden In Service and Gratitude to Dorothy Ramon and the People of Maara’*, features 10 plants chosen by the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians (Serrano peoples) that are significant to the region. A small, framed drawing in the middle of the installation depicts mustard and English reed—two invasive species introduced by settlers to the West and East Coast, respectively.

Clarke’s installation, *One Tract Mind*, made after the 2008 housing crisis, is a commentary on the effects of land development in Temecula, California. The work includes a series of cups filled with water placed on the “roads” of a miniature tract-home community. It asks us to consider who rightfully owns the resources necessary for this and similar developments throughout Southern California.

“This group of artists has been brought together thanks to their diverse and astute observations of feedback loops,” guest curator Debra Scacco explains. The exhibition provides another opportunity for visitors to reflect on the broader impact of individuals and how each of us might envision a different future. “Conduit” is on view at the Ontario Museum of History & Art through May 19, 2024.

Our team learned to be intentional in how we share stories and experiences, not just in terms of narrative perspective or learning style but also in using the exhibition as a site for community gathering and learning.

Inclusive Storytelling

The exhibition addresses the story of water by answering the following questions: Where does water come from? Who does water belong to? Do we have enough water? Who are the water guardians? In the exhibition, visitors are in a free-choice learning environment, allowed to be curious, seek archival and historical information, learn from community and environmental stories, reflect on their relationship with water, and consider how water is a resource tied to community wellbeing.

The team accomplished this in three ways: (1) we took the story and history of water and introduced diverse interpretive tools for different learning styles, (2) we prioritized community relevance and reframed the history we were telling with stories that spoke to a collective memory, and (3) we identified community leaders and professionals who serve as current stewards of water to bring awareness to our shared reality.

With “Built on Water,” our challenge was to distill a complex topic into an exhibition designed to reach a range of audiences, including K–12 school groups, new museum visitors specifically seeking information on the topic of water, and residents of all ages. To do this, we developed a range of interpretive tools that would provide entry points to



Collage of images from various dates and locations in Ontario and the inland Southern California region in the “Built on Water” exhibition.

Photograph by Andrew K. Thompson

different types of learners, such as hands-on activities and interactives, archival images and artifacts, infographics, audio, and digital technologies that include a virtual reality experience and a mobile application. We didn't want visitors to feel intimidated by the exhibition's content.

We also sought to create memorable experiences and spaces for intergenerational learning. One example of this is a magnetic matching game called Nature Scout, which reframes the story of water from an ecological perspective to connect visitors to our visible ecosystem and demonstrate how water supports biodiversity in our region. Visitors are asked to identify water resources, plants, and animals on a large fictional magnetized landscape and match where they live in our visible landscape. The game invites visitors to consider their role as stewards who protect plants and animals and approach their survival as an element of their wellbeing.

The exhibition's history presentation includes multiple perspectives. The history of water management is complex, and we are committed to unpacking that layered story for our visitors in an unbiased way. Acknowledging the shortcomings of our prior history exhibitions, this time we worked with Dr. Meranda Roberts, an external consultant, museum educator, and citizen of the Paiute tribe, to develop a land acknowledgment for the exhibition. The land acknowledgement recognizes the importance of interpretation and encourages visitors to further question and explore the narratives that we present. By presenting history as ever evolving depending on who is telling it, we hope visitors recognize that they are also responsible for telling our local regional history.

The exhibition also incorporates testimonials from community members as a way to address community wellbeing. For example, the exhibition interactive Community Voices on Water is a collection of community stories, each about an individual's relationship with water. One such voice is that of Maura Graber, whose family owns Graber Olives, a working and historic olive farm in Ontario:

"People take a lot of our resources for granted, and I think people need to understand that the air that we breathe, the water we need for crops,

to grow the food that we need to eat, these are all things that we have to have for survival. These are things that you've got to be able to manage wisely and utilize very carefully, and really pay attention to how you're using the Earth's resources."

After listening to the voices, visitors can contribute their own story on a printed water droplet display and read submissions from other visitors.

Connecting to Wellness

Our region continues to change. Parts of Ontario's agricultural land is being developed into tract housing, offices, parks, and logistics complexes. Water permeates every aspect of our lives and society. Not only do we need water to live, but it's a crucial component of food production, business, recreation, and so much more.

Much of the conversation around wellness is centered on mindfulness, a practice that focuses on consciousness, the present, and how we think or feel in our own bodies. However, the physical environment is equally, if not more, important. The health of our physical environment—including our water and air quality, the green spaces in our communities, and our access to healthy food options—has a direct correlation to our community's wellbeing.

Part of our job as a museum is to offer information that is easily digestible, compelling, and encourages further exploration. With "Built on Water," we considered how we could also empower visitors. Wellness in the museum can be embodied in a moment when someone recognizes how they are one piece of a larger narrative in which each individual's action can shape the story. If we, as museums, are willing to give up some of our power as narrators, we can create more dynamic spaces for discovery that empower our community members.

Miriam Valle-Mancilla is the Curator of Education and **Marissa Kuccheck** is Museum Arts & Culture Director of Ontario Museum of History & Art in California. Reach Valle-Mancilla at MValleMancilla@ontarioca.gov and Kuccheck at MKuccheck@ontarioca.gov.



Revisiting **MUSEUMS ADVOCACY DAY 2024**

On February 26–27, **over 300 museum advocates** gathered in Washington, DC, participating in a robust day of programming before making our voices heard on Capitol Hill in over **300 Congressional visits!**



Meeting with elected officials and their staff is an incredibly important and impactful way to advocate for any cause—and the energy was buzzing as advocates came together for Museums Advocacy Day 2024 to urge legislators to support museums! We heard from federal agency leaders and partner policy experts about the unique value of museums, and the importance of advocating for museums and the federal programs that support them. In over 300 Congressional visits, advocates shared critical information on key legislative priorities to support museums, and countless examples of essential and vibrant museums serving their communities.

THANK YOU to all of our 2024 supporters, partners, and advocates who helped make Museums Advocacy Day 2024 an impactful event, and for continuing to advocate for museums in the year ahead.



To read more about Museums Advocacy Day 2024 in our press release and explore our recap photo album, including Congressional visits on Capitol Hill, visit:

» aam-us.org/museums-advocacy-day



CONGRATS! We were pleased to award two dedicated museum advocates with **Advocacy Leadership Awards**: (left to right) **Brenda Granger** (Oklahoma Museums Association), AAM Interim CEO Brooke Leonard, and **Arthur Affleck** (Association of Children's Museums).



Advocates heard federal agency overviews from (left to right): **Laura Huerta Migus** (Institute of Museum and Library Services), **Ayanna Hudson** (National Endowment for the Arts), **Anthony Mitchell** (National Endowment for the Humanities), **Lee Zia** (National Science Foundation), **Megan Brown** (National Park Service), and moderator **William T. Harris** (Space Center Houston).



[1] Advocates speak to Sen. Ed Markey's staff. **[2]** Advocates speak with Sen. Jerry Moran. **[3]** Rep. Paul Tonko and National Endowment for the Humanities Chair Shelly C. Lowe addressed advocates at the Tuesday evening reception. **[4]** An advocate from Alaska speaks with Sen. Lisa Murkowski. **[5]** On Monday, advocates gathered by state for both a networking lunch, and a session in which they prepared for their Tuesday visits together. **[6]** Advocates enjoy a networking reception at the Capitol Visitors Center. **[7]** Museums Advocacy Day 2024 hosted over 300 participating advocates! **[8]** Attendees conversing in between Monday morning sessions. **[9]** Thank you to our Co-Convenor and Leader supporter organizations!



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A heartfelt **THANK YOU** to all the supporters who make Museums Advocacy Day possible!

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