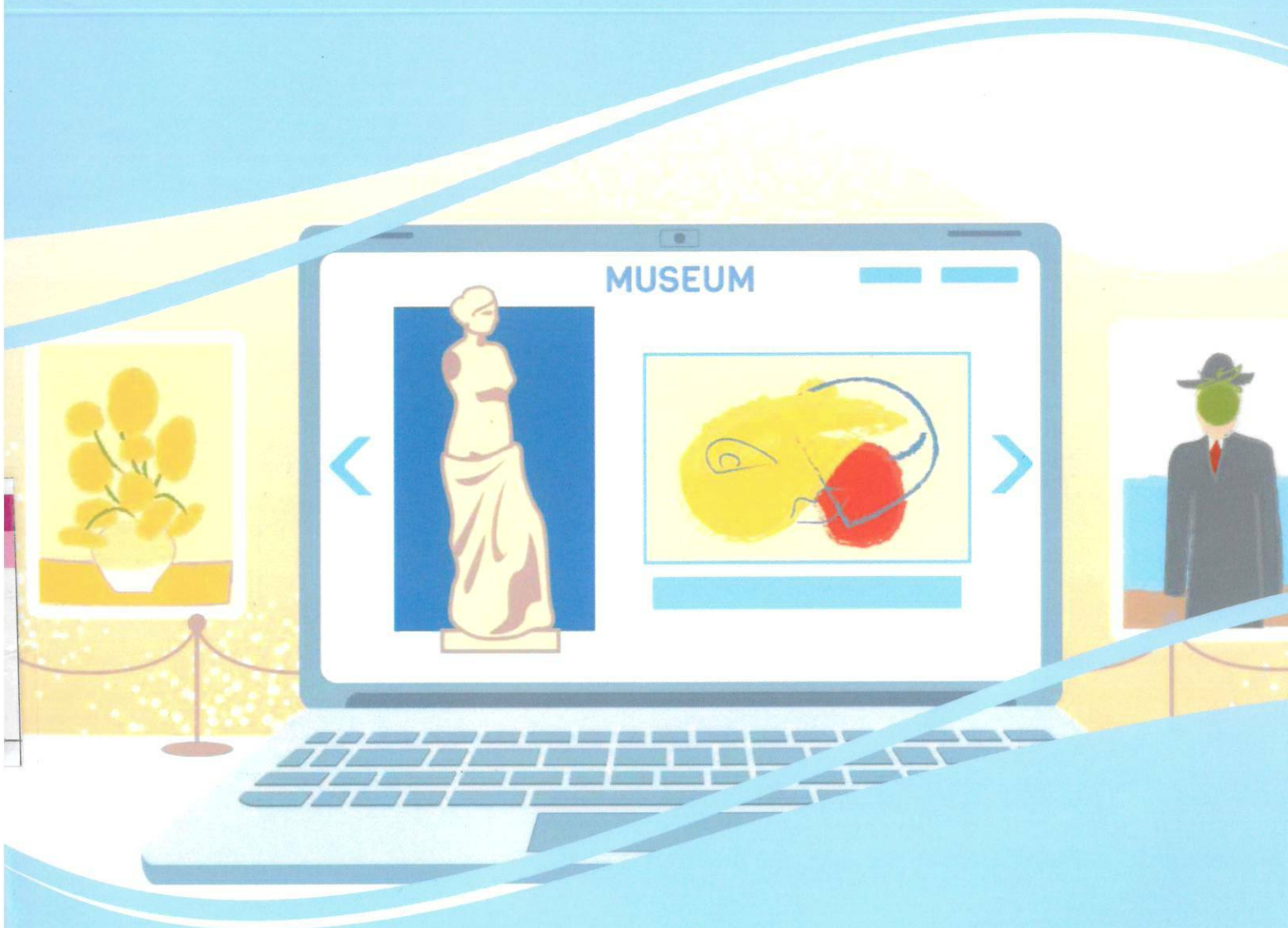


Engaging Communities Through Civic Engagement in Art Museum Education



Bryna Bobick and Carissa DiCindio



Engaging Communities Through Civic Engagement in Art Museum Education

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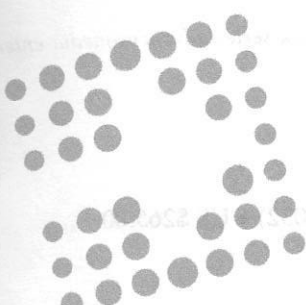
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Section 1
Multiple Voices and Engaging Experiences in Art Museum Education

Chapter 1
Engaging Refugee Audiences Through Process and Performance in Multivocal, Community-
Based Programs 1
Marianna Pegno, Tucson Museum of Art and Historic Block, USA

This chapter explores multivocality, when working with refugees, as an approach to challenge and destabilize homogenizing narratives. Museum as Sanctuary is a long-term program at the Tucson Museum of Art that leverages community partnerships to engage refugee audiences through art-making and in-gallery activities. The author will explore how museums can foster multivocal, community-based programs by creating opportunities for participants to share their opinions, observations, and experiences in response to works of art on view and through their own artistic products. The theories of Trinh T. Minh-ha provide a lens for contextualizing the multivocality that emerges from collaborations and that honors difference, builds comfort, supports individual strengths, and welcomes change. Through a methodological blending of critical narrative inquiry and decolonizing theories, the author examines pedagogical strategies that include performance and process in order to unsettle monolithic ideas to make space for multiplicities.

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During recent years, a growing number of art museums and galleries have experimented with innovative approaches to exhibition development to create more meaningful visitor experiences. However, although commendable, their efforts to make exhibitions visitor-centered have still not been consistent, partially due to the lack of existing models for practice for these kinds of projects. This chapter focuses on supported interpretation (SI), a model for developing visitor-centered exhibitions that can help museum

professionals better advocate for their audiences, engage community members in the process of exhibition development, and turn visitors into active participants who feel empowered to share content during their museum visits. The authors dive deeply into the guidelines for implementing SI, discuss prior iterations of the model, share lessons learned, and explore new scenarios in order to provide current and future art museum educators and interpretive planners with an easy-to-follow roadmap for developing successful visitor-centered SI exhibitions.

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Eunjung Chang, Francis Marion University, USA

This chapter examines African American college students' learning experiences at the Florence County Museum. Looking at several works of art, how do African American students construct their learning experiences in a course-required tour? What personal meanings do they take away from the experience? African American students are voluntarily engaged or only occupied in the works that are related to or connected to their racial roots. They also interpret the works of art from their racial points of view. Therefore, their racial identity as an African American is a key part of understanding their learning experience from the museum. It is important for African Americans not only to see themselves in museum exhibitions but also be able to develop their racial identity and imagine their future through art. It creates equal opportunities for all students from different social, racial, and cultural groups to function effectively in a diverse demographic society.

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Kayleigh L. Kozyra, University of Arizona, USA

Access and inclusion have become "hot topics" in many fields in the last decade, including museum education. While this interest has shed light on the need to improve access to the museum for a number of marginalized groups, people with disabilities still remain largely left out of the conversation. Many museums and their staff continue to struggle to make art museums accessible for this group. This chapter serves as a practical "how-to" for both prospective and current museum educators. This chapter proposes that museums move beyond inclusion, towards a radical form of accessibility that troubles the "check-list" nature of traditional access, values the voices and experiences of people with disabilities, and utilizes principles of universal design.

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Pamela Harris Lawton, Maryland Institute College of Art, USA

This chapter presents a historical account and analysis of Discover Graphics, a defunct museum-school-community partnership developed by the Smithsonian Institution, that for 24 years provided professional level printmaking studio and museum experiences to high school students, college students, and art teachers in the Washington, DC metropolitan region. The description and impact of the program on

school districts, students, teachers, artists, and museum professionals are examined through archival materials, publications, the author’s narrative of experience as a student participant in the program, and its transformative effect on her education and career. The chapter closes with a discussion about community printmaking programs that developed to fill the breach left by the closure of Discover Graphics and suggests possible future museum-school-community partnerships.

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School and Teacher Partnerships at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art 126
Mary Webster, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, USA

This chapter examines educational programming at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art. The educational value of single and multi-visit field trips is discussed. The author shares how the Brooks structures its STEAM field trip and provides instructions for an art making activity. The community impact of the Mid-South Scholastic Art awards is explained. Consideration is given to the importance of designing museum programming aligned to state curriculum standards. Examples of teacher workshops are provided. Best practices for successfully welcoming school groups to the museum environment are also shared.

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Ting Fang Claire Chien, Colorado State University, USA
Patrick G. Fahey, Colorado State University, USA

In this chapter, the authors demonstrate how a university Art Education program assists the university art museum and trains students to lead tours for BRAINY (BRinging Arts INtegration to Youth), the museum’s educational program for Title I schools. The authors present how they guide student educators to develop tours for BRAINY by applying different interpretive strategies. The impacts that BRAINY creates for the visiting students and local communities include 1) the enhancement of civic engagement for young citizens, 2) high-quality art experiences for Title I schools, 3) the extended community program—Family Day. The impacts on student art educators are 1) knowing how to teach art in different learning contexts that are outside of the classroom, 2) applying the questioning strategies to their classroom teaching for probing art dialogues with students, 3) learning to be prepared but also flexible for unexpected situations. This chapter provides a practical and positive example to address a wonderful collaboration between an art museum, community members, and higher education.

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Dana Carlisle Kletchka, AAEP, The Ohio State University, USA
Shelly Casto, Highland Youth Garden, USA

Art museums in the United States have long been called upon to provide educational and engaging experiences for their visitors; more recently, this expectation has expanded to address the most salient needs of local communities and respond to issues of social inequality. At The Ohio State University’s Wexner Center for the Arts, these collaborations are woven into the mission of the institution and serve as a foundation of its educational framework. In this chapter, the authors highlight specific community

collaborations between the Wexner Center for the Arts, the Department of Arts Administration, Education, and Policy at Ohio State, and the Columbus, Ohio, community. They suggest that these programs not only individually serve as examples for other institutions and university students engaged in museum education scholarship, but also collectively form a socially responsive museum pedagogy enacted in an ongoing cycle of collaborative inquiry.

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Thoughts and Highlights Involving an Urban Museum Education Partnership and a University 186
Bryna Bobick, University of Memphis, USA

This chapter examines the partnership between an urban art museum and a university. It involves museum educators, art education faculty, and undergraduate students. It specifically explores the development of hands-on museum activities for elementary students created by the university participants. The chapter is written from a higher education perspective. It provides a description of all facets of the partnership from its planning to the completion of the museum activities. The partnership provided the university students authentic museum experiences and ways to make professional connections with museum professionals. Recommendations for those who wish to develop university/museum partnerships are shared.

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Integrating Student Workers Into Museum Practice 205
Kathryn Medill, Arizona State University, USA

Launched in January 2016 at a university art museum on a large campus, the Museum Engagement Student Worker position aims to reimagine the student work-study role. Conceptualized as a role where students can experience and contribute to the museum’s internal culture, the program integrates students into the museum’s internal fabric and empowers them to act as engagement agents for community members. Museum Engagement Student Workers function as front-of-house staff, provide all public tours, and assist with public programming. This narrative, written from the author’s perspective as the manager of the student worker role, examines the successes and challenges of the Museum Engagement Student Worker program using tenets of the museum’s strategic plan (innovation, accessibility, engagement, community, sustainability) as points of reference.

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Decorating Up a Few Acres of the Rocky Mountains: Engaging Art and Design Students in a
Historic House Museum 225
Rebecka A. Black, Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design, USA
Heather Pressman, Molly Brown House Museum, USA

In this chapter, the authors explore the development of a partnership between undergraduate art history students at an art and design college and educators at a historic house museum in Denver, CO. From this partnership, the museum team created authentic opportunities for student voice in three different art history survey courses. In these classes, students engaged in practical applications of art historical research and created original objects of art, while the college provided resources and audience to support museum programming and development. Here, the authors discuss how these projects developed into a lasting and mutually beneficial partnership for continued socially engaged art history and design opportunities for students.

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Jennifer Schero, Virginia Commonwealth University, USA

Many art museums rely upon volunteers, often titled docents, to implement a range of educational offerings, including guided gallery experiences. As such, docents regularly engage visitors more than most museum staff members. A review of literature spanning over a century provides support for an examination of four reoccurring themes within museum education and docent history: uncertain definitions, professionalization, theoretical foundation, and embedded traditions. Subsequently, consideration of the past offers context for examining contemporary museum education programs that develop the capacity of docents as change agents, including offerings during the COVID-19 pandemic and developing inclusive practice through docent education. The chapter concludes with an envisioning of the future for docents within museum education.

Chapter 13

- Stay Gold: An Intergenerational LGBTQIA+ Arts Program 269
Eli Burke, Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson, USA
Harrison Orr, Independent Researcher, USA
Carissa DiCindio, University of Arizona, USA

This chapter focuses on the experiences of participants in an intergenerational art program for LGBTQIA+ audiences, which takes place at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson (MOCA). In this chapter, the authors outline the impetus and purpose of this program. They consider the impact that it has had on LGBTQIA+ individuals and the formation of an intergenerational community. From combating loneliness to creating connections across generations, this program invites individuals into the museum space who identify as LGBTQIA+ but rarely have the opportunity to connect with one another. Facilitators and participants design projects and gallery activities that promote engagement through dialogue and art-making. As such, art provides connections that give participants opportunities to share and learn from one another. Contemporary art and the museum become sites for engagement. Gallery activities and art-making allow participants to experiment with a range of materials and learn new skills through humor, play, creative inquiry, and collaboration.

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Morgan Wells, Tucson Museum of Art, USA
Xoe Fiss, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, USA

By 2035, the aging population will be larger than that of people 18 and younger. More than ever, art museums must consider how to best serve this audience. Research on the development of aging adults highlights that creative aging programming provides a beneficial impact on the lives of older adults while helping to combat ageism and redefine how older adults are seen in cultural institutions. This chapter reviews the similarities and differences between the programming for adults 55 and older at the Tucson Museum of Art, a mid-size regional institution, and The John Michael Kohler Arts Center, a rural,

contemporary arts center. Through an analysis of the two institutions' programs for older adults, the authors discuss how older adults can fulfill the roles of visitor, participant, and learner when presented with equitable and intentional opportunities.

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Foreword

On a Saturday morning in August 2020, I had a profound experience with a work of art. I visited a Black Lives Matter mural commissioned by Washington DC mayor Muriel Bowser and painted on a public street facing the White House. As I stood at the beginning of the mural, I could see the entire three blocks the bold yellow letters occupied. It was a sacred experience. There were other people there and there were city sounds in the distance, but for me all of that was nonexistent. As a child, I grew up in what was still the “Jim Crow” south. Public schools were not integrated until I was a junior in high school. I remember vividly when Martin Luther King was shot and the deaths of Medgar Evers and Malcolm X. All of this came flooding back for me that morning. Although there has been great progress in civil rights over the subsequent years including the election of Barack Obama, the nation’s first Black president, the most recent protests over the seemingly endless tragic deaths of unarmed Black individuals at the hands of police hit me like a ton of bricks. I tried to hold back tears-but could not. The experience was deeply meaningful and one I would not forget.

As I was thinking about writing the foreword to this new book focusing on museums and community engagement, I realized that my experience in DC, while not within a museum itself, was exactly the kind of experience museums today seek to make possible, inclusive opportunities for their visitors to experience moments of reflection and insight, to become engaged in ways that are both meaningful and memorable. The field has seen a number of books and articles in recent years that address the nature of these experiences and the reasons such experiences are important (Burham & Kai-Kee, 2011; Falk & Dierking, 2013; Villeneuve, 2007). What emerges is that contemporary museums are becoming dynamic spaces where meaning is created by the interaction between the museum and the visitor. Interpretation is not predetermined by a museum authority but instead emerges as the product of what each participant brings to that encounter.

The role universities can play in this process is of special importance to me. My career as a university art education professor allowed me to work closely with The Georgia Museum of Art located on the University of Georgia’s campus. Only a five-minute walk away, its galleries often became extensions of the classroom. Whether it was a trip to see a particular work pulled from storage, or to have a behind-the-scenes tour, or to engage in a class interpretation in the gallery, these experiences always gave me life to the course content. They provided tangible evidence of the value these experiences could provide. One favorite museum teaching experience involved using two adjacent and connecting galleries housing decorative arts from the late 18th through the early 20th centuries but each focusing on objects representing differing economic and social status. One gallery contained fine silver, glassware, and period pieces from upper-economic level homes; the other contained more down-to-earth pieces like useful pottery.

handmade, more-rustic furniture, and a quilt and quilting frame among other objects, typical of what might have been found in a more rustic dwelling, like a sharecropper's cabin.

The students' assignment was to look through both galleries and find an object that "spoke" to them. They then sat in front of that object and wrote a brief narrative as if they were that object. Guiding questions included what the objects were made from, what their purpose was, how they were used, and what they might have meant to those who used them. We then took time for students to read aloud what they had written. One graduate student chose to write about the quilt frame as if it was used by the women's church auxiliary and filling the room with sound, conversations, and singing as they quilted. She wrote that when the women came to quilt, "They cover[ed] me with all kinds of cloth, in strips, in swatches, in patches. I can't see anything but I can tell from the weight they are using whether they are using soft silks and shiny taffetas to make a quilt for a fancy home, or itchy woollens and coarse denim to make a quilt for a worker's cabin that has no heat. Day by day, the quilt gets heavier and one day the ladies lift it off. . . Once the quilt is lifted off my simple blue frame, I feel a little cold, a little lonely. I wait for the ladies to return."

Finding such meaning and emotional connection with a humble quilting frame through writing was a meaningful experience not only for this student but for the rest of the class as they listened to the student read her narrative. They were also deeply engaged in the connections they developed with the objects they had chosen. Reading their writing aloud brought their classmates into those unique and personal relationships. The exercise incorporated choice - choice of which gallery to focus on and choice of which object to focus upon. The way the galleries were juxtaposed emphasized cultural and economic contrasts that deepened the meaning of the exercise. Time too was an important factor; there needed to be a sense of timelessness in order for the students to become absorbed in the writing process.

This book addresses basic questions that can help make such experiences possible: How do museums create opportunities for personal interpretation to occur? How can we create an inclusive educational space and relevant programming that includes those communities that have often felt that museums were for someone else, not for them? How can we successfully involve museum educators, higher education faculty, K-12 teachers, and the community itself in this process? It is structured to present examples of such tangible efforts and is divided into sections that address multiple voices in the museum, K-12 student engagement, collaboration between universities, museums, and the community, and intergenerational efforts. The authors range from those early in their professional careers to esteemed scholars in the field, bringing a broad range of perspective to the text. As we seek ways to develop strong community-oriented programming, this book promises to inspire relationships between museums, higher education, and the communities they serve. It joins those efforts of other forward thinking texts to open, as Maxine Greene (2007) wrote, "whole new spaces of possibility" (p. 659), ones more truly reflective of the diverse communities of today.

Carole Henry

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Preface: Civic Engagement and Art Museum Education

In 2002, the American Association of Museums, now the Alliance of American Museums (AAM), published a collection of essays in *Mastering civic engagement: A challenge to museums*. Written through AAM's Museums & Community (M&C) Initiative, this publication was considered a "call to action" as museums considered ways to engage in their communities in active and mutually beneficial ways (Casagrande, p. ix). In this book, Hirzy (2002) argued that understanding civic engagement is critical to the survival of museums, writing that this type of engagement goes beyond "working together and diversifying audiences" to "reciprocal, co-created relationships that connect the assets and purposes of organizations" (p. 16). Almost two decades later, we look to art museum education to demonstrate how civic engagement has evolved and developed through collaborations, partnerships, and innovative programming.

The relationships between museums as institutions and their communities are inherently complex (Watson, 2007). The Progressivist foundations of art museum education have led to a long history of community programming and outreach in many institutions (DiCindio & Steinmann, 2019; Hein, 2012). However, these initiatives have not always been mutually beneficial. Some museums are guided by their own perceptions of the programming and resources that communities need, instead of working *with* communities to identify needs and interests (Simon, 2016). Watson (2007) recognizes that "museums often struggle to understand the relationships they have with their communities and how difficult they find it to share the power that they have" (p. 9). Because museums have an enduring record of representing privileged voices, some groups are misrepresented or left out of museums entirely through the objects and stories museums choose to share in exhibitions and programming (p. 10). We embark on this book with an understanding that systemic racism and white privilege remain at play in museums (Dewhurst & Hendrick, 2018; Harper & Hendrick, 2017; Jung, 2014; Jung, 2016; Quinn, 2020), and there is still much work to be done. As Jung (2016) argues, "Achieving and promoting inclusiveness in museum practices is never a fixed destination but involves constant struggles and paradigm shifts in order to critically examine ever-changing museum practices and communities they serve (p. 11).

What do we mean by civic engagement? As Adler and Goggin (2005) note, the definition of civic engagement depends on the perspective of the person using this term. It can encompass different age groups who engage with the community through service, collective action, political involvement, and social change (p. 238-239). The chapters in this edited volume exemplify the many ways that civic engagement in art museum education create a bridge between the institutions of museums and the community. The authors, drawing from experiences in art museums, community organizations, K-12 classrooms, and higher education, consider how "engaged activities" make an impact in communities, a concept at

the heart of civic engagement through the arts (Hershey & Bobick, 2016, xxii). As Americans for the Arts (n.d.). outlines:

Civic engagement encompasses the many ways that people may get involved in their communities to consider and address civic issues. Civic engagement can be a measure or a means of social change. In arts-based civic engagement, the creative process and resulting art work/experience can provide a key focus, catalyst, or space for civic participation, whether it is becoming better informed or actively contributing to the improvement of one's neighborhood, community, and nation.

These chapters open possibilities for new types of community engagement by adding new perspectives to museum programming, considering ways in which museums are responding to communities, and recognizing the potential of art museums in these collaborations and partnerships (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Through this lens, this book was written for museum educators, students, classroom teachers, and community leaders invested in the capability of art museums to engage communities through inclusive practices and sharing resources and power. We hope that readers find inspiration, information, and ideas for their own organizations in this book. Through our focus on individual programs and experiences, we seek to honor the many voices included in art museum programming and to understand how relationships develop through the process of working through these types of collaborations.

We embarked on this project in a different world than the one in which we finished it. During the period in which authors wrote the chapters for this book, COVID-19, a global pandemic, spread around the world, changing how we interact with each other and how we use museum and community spaces. Civic unrest and activism erupted in the United States in response to the murders of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, often at the hands of police, sparking museums to create dialogue and respond to Black Lives Matter. Authors incorporated the impact of these events in the chapters, responding in real time as events continue to shift and evolve. We look forward to future publications in which museum educators and teachers delve further into these issues as they continue to find ways to address and create action that can lead to change through their work with communities.

The chapters that make up this book reflect the wide variety of ways in which art museum education intersects with civic engagement. They come from experiences in the United States, and we recognize that museums around the world are creative and innovative in their approaches to community programming and civic engagement. We hope that the programs and collaborations described in this volume inspire further dialogue, spark new forms of partnerships, and activate change through social justice initiatives in communities.

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Bryna Bobick

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Section 1

Multiple Voices and Engaging Experiences in Art Museum Education

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores
the role of the art museum
in the 21st century
and how it can leverage
its resources to create
engaging experiences
for all visitors.
The chapter provides a
framework for understanding
the challenges and opportunities
facing art museums today
and offers strategies for
creating more inclusive
and engaging experiences
for all visitors.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins by
examining the role of the
art museum in the 21st
century and how it can
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for all visitors. The chapter
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understanding the challenges
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experiences for all visitors.

Chapter 1

Engaging Refugee Audiences Through Process and Performance in Multivocal, Community-Based Programs

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores multivocality, when working with refugees, as an approach to challenge and destabilize homogenizing narratives. Museum as Sanctuary is a long-term program at the Tucson Museum of Art that leverages community partnerships to engage refugee audiences through art-making and in-gallery activities. The author will explore how museums can foster multivocal, community-based programs by creating opportunities for participants to share their opinions, observations, and experiences in response to works of art on view and through their own artistic products. The theories of Trinh T. Minh-ha provide a lens for contextualizing the multivocality that emerges from collaborations and that honors difference, builds comfort, supports individual strengths, and welcomes change. Through a methodological blending of critical narrative inquiry and decolonizing theories, the author examines pedagogical strategies that include performance and process in order to unsettle monolithic ideas to make space for multiplicities.

INTRODUCTION

As museums begin to reframe themselves as socially responsive institutions attentive to the needs of their audiences, programs have become more focused on collaborating with communities. In order to become more relevant, museums are relying on community-based partnerships to broaden their reach and engage new visitors. As a result, programs and exhibitions are becoming multivocal, reflecting Hooper-Greenhill's (2000) concept of the post-museum, where "many voices are heard" (p. 144) and "histories

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that have been hidden away are being brought to light” (p. 145). By incorporating more voices, museums can begin to shed their authoritative and omniscient tone in exhibit and program design, culminating in more complete histories and stories of art objects in the museum.

This chapter highlights excerpts from a multi-year research project focused on a long-term, community-museum partnership called *Museum as Sanctuary (MaS)*, involving the Tucson Museum of Art (TMA), which is a regional art museum in the southwestern US, and a non-profit collaborating organization named Owl & Panther (OP) that specializes in multi-generational, expressive arts programming for refugees affected by torture, trauma, and traumatic dislocation.¹ Taking inspiration from Viv Golding and Wayne Modest (2013), *MaS* situates art museum practice within the realm of social practice, redefining the museum-community relationship as “more than mere consultation and inclusion of diverse perspectives” (p.1). As a result, the program challenges the power dynamics inherent within art museums by problematizing: how objects are displayed; how audiences are positioned within the institution; and how exhibitions are developed. *MaS* highlights the way in which embracing, displaying, and incorporating diverse narratives from refugees in art museum programming and exhibitions redefines institutional norms so that change is constant, migration is global, and voices from the margins are lauded.

From this point on, rather than referring to myself as author, I will use the first-person perspective in order to combat the false boundaries of the distanced, solitary, and objective researcher. The two-year study that resulted in this chapter hinged on the mingling of voices and perspectives between researcher, or author, and participant. As such what is presented here reflects the belief that “the conditions of research that make such a clinical act possible are also antithetical to the establishment of a genuine two-way dialogue” (Sinha & Black, 2014, p. 473 – 474). Multivocal museums and the nature of community-based programs deconstruct and call into question notions of expertise, a modernist approach to knowledge, and singular truths. Instead, research and by extension museum practice is humanized, personalized, and engaged.

Within this study, perspectives are personal and complicated and to pretend that there is a dissociated author would be counterintuitive to the personal and empathetic approach required to build successful community-based partnerships. Additionally, the term *author* asserts and reinforces “unequal power relationships” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2009, p. 2), rather than complicating them, which are often the realities of working within collaborative program development. As such, in my practice as a museum professional, I have found that collaboration thrives where voices are multiplied and moments of alignment or overlap are amplified to determine learning objectives and creative projects. In this study, it is important to note that multivocality does not exclude honoring individuality, but rather is an approach to explore and build collaborative networks and activated learning experiences that challenge singular ways of knowing. Within these pedagogical exchanges, process is honored, and performances are enacted in order to engage audiences through community-based programs.

Within multivocal museums exhibitions and programs, there is a mingling of diverse and complex voices—such as participant-artist and museum educator. This cultivates collaborative, action-oriented platforms for learning, engagement, and dialogue, broadening how we see, understand, interpret, and produce knowledge. According to Charles Garoian (2001), performance—or an unfolding of action with transformative potential—within the museum creates the potential for “new possibilities” (p. 236) where “viewers challenge the museum’s monologic practices” (p. 237) by “introducing narrative content that would otherwise remain ignored” (p. 237). To further this concept of the art museum as a performative environment, I am drawing parallels to the theories of Trinh T. Minh-ha (2011), who acknowledges the ways in which “...participants’ moves are mutually defined by one another, each response...a perfor-

mance of its own" (p. 94). Through these mutually informed actions, the museum, its programs, and the people within the space depend on one another. Thus, each participant—in this case, refugee, community partner, and museum educator—is a crucial component in how a museum functions and is understood in this study. Through these interactions and exchanges, the museum begins to open up to new experiences wherein "collaborative leadership involves thinking and acting across boundaries, often among organizations that are unconventional partners" (Hizry, 2002, p. 14). Thus, within the context of this research, the art museum is a space where the collection, exhibition, and preservation of objects occur alongside conversation, collaboration, and exchange, and where no action is privileged but rather, all are necessary in order to develop successful, multivocal museum practice.

Questions, Defining Terms and an Overview

In this study, I address the primary research question:

- How can art museum educators, or edu-curators, create spaces that provoke, and engage with, narratives between communities and museums?

In exploring this main question, I also engage with the following subquestions:

- What multivocal narratives are revealed when refugee populations and edu-curators actively engage in and collaborate on museum programming?
- How do these narratives change over time?

The activities and artmaking prompts in this study are examples of some strategies used to stoke an exchange of narratives between communities—in this case, refugee families who came to the museum through a partnership with a local non-profit, and an art museum. Throughout this chapter, I use the terms *multivocal*² and *performance*³ to describe narratives that have multiple authors and varying opinions (multivocality) and an unfolding of action over time (performance).

This work shares excerpts from a longitudinal research study, which took place between Summer 2013 and Summer 2015, on the partnership between the Tucson Museum of Art (TMA) and Owl & Panther (OP) as part of *Museum as Sanctuary (MaS)*. *MaS* began in the fall of 2010 and meets regularly at the TMA, which entails activities that occur both in a studio setting, where participants make art, and in the galleries where they discuss and write about artworks on view. Additionally, two feature exhibitions at TMA showcased participant artwork—the first in 2013 and the second in 2015. This collaboration is an example of how one program, and its related pedagogical strategies and community-based exhibitions, illustrates a multivocal museum practice—amplifying voices, perspectives, and ideas shifting away from homogenizing narratives. Whereby multivocal museums are defined by sustained collaboration, a flexibility to adapt, honoring process over product, and making space for change. What follows in this chapter is a brief overview, or background, on *MaS*; a review of methods and study design; sections exploring data and programmatic occurrences; and finally, conclusions, reflections, and recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The Tucson Museum of Art and Historic Block (TMA) has worked with immigrants and refugees since the fall of 2010, when it started *Museum as Sanctuary* with one partner—Owl & Panther, which is the focus of this chapter—and slowly we began to expand to include new collaborators and opportunities. *MaS* includes on-going partnerships with:

- **Owl & Panther**, an organization that serves refugee families who are primary and secondary survivors of torture by supporting them in building life skills, becoming familiar with their local community, and increasing self-confidence. This partner is unique because it goes beyond the immediate direct services of language acquisition, short-term support to recently arriving refugees, and school-based mentorship—instead, it builds long-term support systems and networks of care for families. Participants can stay connected to the programs developed by the organization and its partners for as long as they wish—existing as resource for refugees at any point of their resettlement journey. Additionally, all activities of Owl & Panther are intergenerational. While most participants are school age (7-18 years), it is not uncommon to have parents participate with their children. The primary focus of this organization is to foster community, connectivity, and relationships.
- Refugee resettlement agencies, including **Lutheran Social Services** and the **International Rescue Committee, Arizona**—the latter which we started working with in 2013 to provide resources and trainings for our staff to become more well-versed in working with refugees. Since then, we have also developed programs together to help combat isolation often felt by recent arrivals and support individual empowerment. Most recently we have been collaborating with Lutheran Social Services on how to support their mentorship program for refugee youth and young adults through virtual tours and workshops with artists, due to limited in person programming resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.
- Since 2017, we have been working with **Literacy Connects**, a local non-profit with an English Language Acquisition for Adults program, to offer a three-class, arts-based English language workshop (held always on a weekend), where each 4-hour session involves language instruction, writing prompts, opportunities for sharing, gallery exploration, and bookmaking. To ensure more consistent attendance and offer intergenerational opportunities, this program also involves an expressive arts component for children of the adult participants.

Key to the success of *Museum as Sanctuary* is the collaborative nature of the program, whereby working with organizations supporting immigrant and refugee communities through direct services, we have been able to build more relevant and impactful programming.

Museum as Sanctuary moves away from “one-off” or single-visit programs to multiple points of contact, both within the museum and beyond its walls. Generally, these programs serve a small group of participants, 25 or less but, we often work together for at least two hours at a time and for between three to eight sessions, depending on the partner and program objectives, ranging from language learning to expressive arts. As we expanded our partner base, we learned our programs had to be “site-specific,” meaning each partnership required that we think a little differently about the types of experiences being developed—ensuring that we were leveraging each collaborator’s unique expertise and specialty. These relationships take time to establish and trust is not built overnight, and as museum professionals,

we must be willing to revise and adapt to the needs of our audiences for such programs to be successful. For us there were some keys to success which included: long-term relationships, honoring our partner's expertise, active/generous listening to ensure we were meeting the needs of our partners and participants, and creating opportunities where participants could become leaders of experiences. While *Museum as Sanctuary* involves multiple partners, I am now going to focus in-depth on the community-museum partnership between the Tucson Museum of Art and Owl & Panther, which was the subject of a multi-year study. However, before moving forward I must warn you that, "if you are looking for a complete story, you are not going to find it here. If your 'trained mind' is looking for the whole thing, it is not here either" (Moreira, 2011, p. 586). Instead what follows are excerpts and multivocal encounters that blend and complicate voices and identities in a curated performance on pedagogy within a single museum-community program.

A Collaborative Longitudinal Study: Context and Location

This longitudinal research study investigates a long-term community-museum program in an art museum. The setting, programmatic structure, and participants comprising this study are fundamental entities that informed the study design and types of data collected. Tucson Museum of Art, a mid-sized regional art museum located in the Southwestern region of the United States approximately 60 miles north of the U.S-Mexico border. In the summer of 2013 *Museum as Sanctuary* collaboratively created its first exhibition (see Figure 1 and 2). This was the museum's first attempt at community-based exhibition. The majority of curatorial texts were written solely from the facilitators' perspective, including TMA educators and program staff from OP, while leaving out the voice of participants in introductory labels and section texts. However, participant voice was included through object labels. By contrast, the 2015 exhibition critically engaged with how community-based exhibitions are constructed and what an art museum with decolonizing practices looks like by including a variety of objects and labels written from multiple perspectives. The second exhibition (see Figure 3 and 4) focused on the concept of resilience and was broken into several sections that included over 140 individual objects. Due to the large number of works installed in the exhibition the curatorial program veered greatly from the modernist aesthetic of one work of art hung at eye level with space to breathe around all sides. Instead, works were hung salon style and clustered into thematic sections.

These exhibitions, and the educational elements that fostered them highlight the ways in which embracing, displaying, and incorporating diverse narratives from refugees in art museum programming and exhibitions helps to rethink structures where change is constant, migration is global, and voices from the margins are valued. The majority of this chapter focuses on the programmatic and pedagogical engagements within *Museum as Sanctuary* that occurred between the two exhibitions, which include in-gallery learning and artmaking. Occasional references will be made throughout the following sections since the exhibitions, gallery explorations, and creative experiments are deeply connected within this study.

Figure 1. Installation view, *Museum as Sanctuary* 2013 exhibition
Source: Used with permission of author, 2013



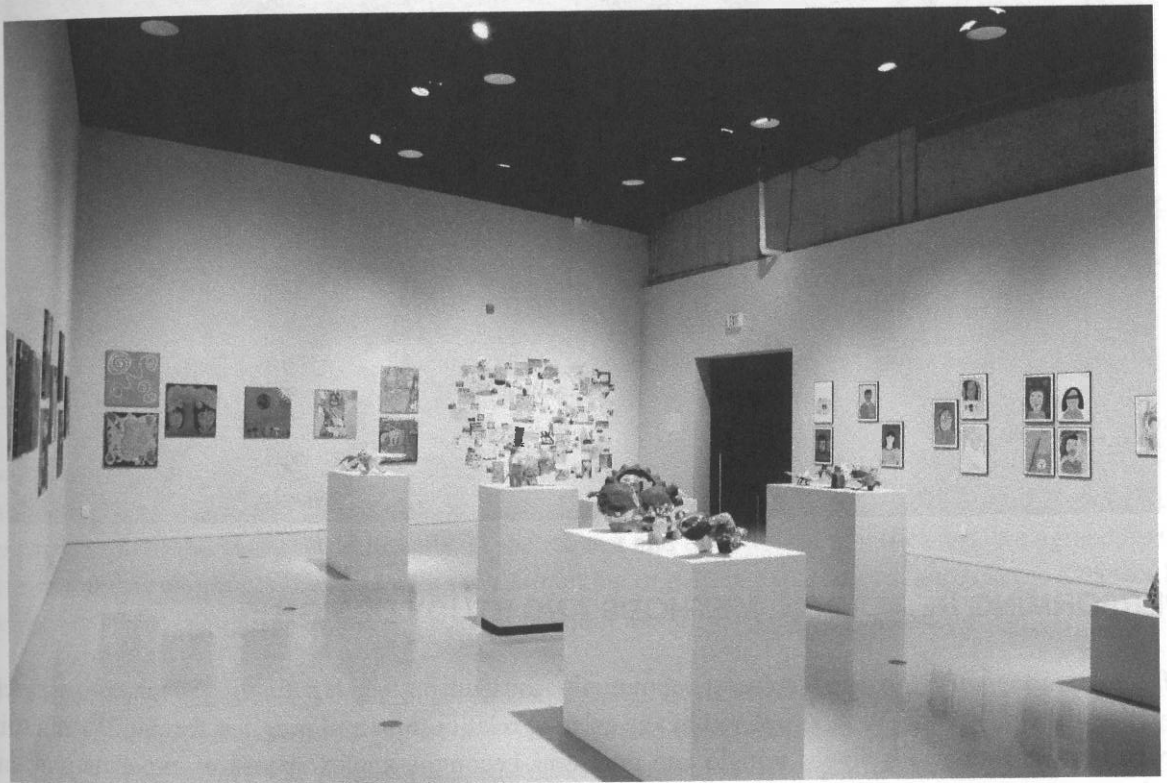
A typical session of *Museum as Sanctuary* begins at 6:00 PM, when participants and volunteers begin arriving, and by 6:30 PM, everyone (approximately 30 participants, 20 volunteers, two OP staff members, and two to three TMA educators) has begun working on the evening's activities. During the 1.5 hours of session time, small groups work collaboratively on gallery activities, or participants concentrate on their own individual art projects. In some instances, this might mean that 30 individuals are working on 30 unique studio projects, in which case the needs of each participant may vary drastically throughout the evening. At 7:45 PM, clean up begins; by 8:15 PM, participants and volunteers have left the TMA's education center. This process repeats itself three to eight times a semester. Over the course of this research study, the facilitators of *MaS* have experimented with layering education and curatorial practice by creating interpretative materials for works in permanent and temporary exhibitions. In addition, the program has mounted two exhibitions at the TMA, which included not only participant artworks, but also biographies and descriptive labels written by participants. In preparation for these exhibitions, participant-artists visited the museum's galleries to seek inspiration, where encouraged to experiment with art materials, and asked to write about their artworks.

Participant-artists (refugee youth and adults), partner organizations (such Owl & Panther), and museum professionals—specifically, an edu-curator who exists between the disciplinary boundaries of education and curation and is defined by collaboration and a visitor-centered practice. Edu-curation involves a conscious shift in curatorial practice from the singular to the multiple, whereby “Embracing a collaborative approach to curation plays to individual skill sets, relieving team members of the

privilege or burden of functioning as sole authority” (Villeneuve & Love, 2017, p. 17). Fifteen refugee participant-artists were continuous voices within the two-year data collection period, meaning they were featured in both exhibitions, helping to document shifts and growth in the community-museum program. These participant-artists come from Bhutan, Chile, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Iraq, and Nepal, and vary greatly in age with the majority of participants being school-age, with the youngest born in 2005 (7 years old during the program), and the oldest born in 1949. Additionally, these participant-artists have been living in the United States for a variety of lengths of time; one is a first generation American while most arrived as refugees as early as the 1970s and as recently as 2012. In describing characters within this section, it also seems to be important to provide a clarifying definition of refugee and, by extension, refugee resettlement.

Figure 2. Installation view, Museum as Sanctuary 2013 exhibition

Source: Used with permission of author, 2013



Each year, armed conflict and persecution cause individuals to flee their families, communities, and countries, resulting in a growing number of refugees. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees there are over 70.8 million displaced people worldwide, and 25.9 million refugees, individuals who cannot return home due to a “well-founded fear of being persecuted” (2020). In the United States, the Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration notes that between 1975 and April 30, 2020, over 3.4 million refugees have been resettled in the United States (2020). However, since January 2019, the United States continues to subject refugees to persecution through a

series of controversial Executive Orders,⁴ resulting in the lowest refugee resettlement ceiling in fiscal 2020 at 18,000 since 1975,⁵ and completely halting refugee resettlement and immigration as of April 2020 because of COVID-19 and “risks” to employment.⁶

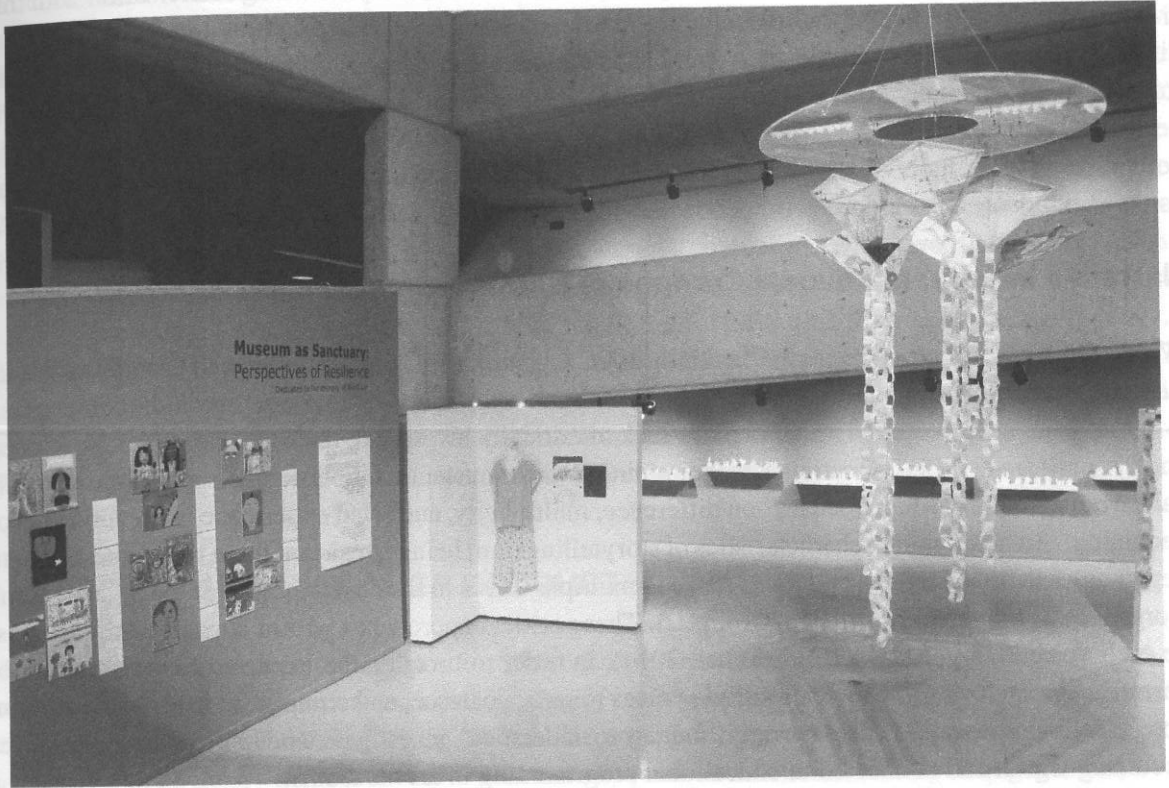
Figure 3. Installation view, Museum as Sanctuary 2015 exhibition
Source: Used with permission of author, 2013



PERFORMING RESEARCH: METHODS AND STUDY DESIGN

Museum as Sanctuary is first and foremost a community-museum partnership; for this reason, the research practice and study design were structured by the existing relationships and program format. Within this programmatic framework voices mingle and museums become complex spaces of experimentation, exchange, and creativity. Thus, research on such programs are a multivocal performance featuring a methodological blending of critical narrative inquiry and decolonizing theories—where parallels between the actions to decolonize and to perform are made. Marcelo Diversi and Claudio Moreira (2012) claim that, “theories of decolonization are indeed performative, and so are our collective messy stories.” (p. 194). Similarly, Norman Denzin (2003) sees the performative as an activated space of potential where, “Pedagogically, and ideologically, the performative becomes an act of doing (Giroux 2000, p.135), a dialogic way of being in the world, a way of grounding performances in the concrete situations of the present” (Denzin, 2003, p. 239). These understandings and definitions ground my methodological approach to understanding multivocal community-based programs in art museums.

Figure 4. Installation view, Museum as Sanctuary 2015 exhibition
Source: Used with permission of author, 2013



Data for this study was collected over a two-year period, between summer 2013 – summer 2015, and was bookended by two exhibitions of participant artworks that was displayed in the museum's galleries. All study participants consented to the research verbally and were made aware that they were not required to participate in the study.⁷ Additionally, at the request and direction of a participant, we agreed that I as a researcher would not interfere with their artmaking or gallery explorations, and that the data would only come from regularly-occurring exchanges within the art museum, including:

- Educator reflections and field notes written immediately after each session.
- Written responses from in-gallery activities, created by approximately 30 individuals, including participant-artists and support staff/volunteers from the partner organization.
- Participant-artist written descriptions of their artmaking in the form of object labels and artist statements or biographies, produced for each exhibition.

A Performative Multivocal Research Practice

Key to understanding this idea of performance and multivocality as a research practice are the methodological reflections of Norman Denzin (2003) and Julie Choi (2016). Denzin defines performance as a critical pedagogy where “Performance becomes public pedagogy when it uses the aesthetic, the performative, to foreground the intersection of politics, institutional sites, and embodied experience”

(2003, p. 9). My study utilizes this idea in order to explore narratives from refugee participants, partner organizations, and art museum educators at points of intersection and tension. In conversation with this are the ideas of Choi, where multivocality defines an individual "...who holds and carries out several different roles simultaneously in their daily life. We are all shifting in and out of, entangled in, and influenced by our many voices" (2016, p. 7). Together, these concepts from Denzin and Choi define performative multivocality, which speaks to the enacting and active exchange of the multiplicities and complexities of an individual's experiences, ideas, and identity within a collaborative network – such as the regularly-occurring interactions and activities that were already part of *Museum as Sanctuary*.

Narrative Inquiry: Multivocal Composite Narratives

Within this study, narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; and Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, & Huber, 2016) is used to explore the content and themes that emerge through dialogue and programmatic occurrences. These practices seek to critically investigate the ways narratives are shaped and disseminated within educational programming at an art museum. Of particular importance is a critical narrative inquiry, which focuses "on difference, multiplicity, and lived experience in the moments of becoming... [where] unique characteristics of storytelling [are] being a resistant force that contests extant hegemonies in organizations and gives space to multiple voices in the configuration of the organization" (Jørgensen & Largacha-Martinez, 2014, p. 2). These critical approaches within narrative inquiry must be multivoiced (Jørgensen, Klee & Canal, 2014), in order to broaden the expected linear structure of narrative. As such, in this chapter, multiple voices mingle, coalesce, and complicate the stories museum objects tell. In this way, I utilize narrative inquiry to understand, investigate, and interrogate experiences occurring within and connected to educational programming in art museums.

Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, and Huber (2016) see narrative inquiry as an opportunity to "linger in the complex layers of intertwined and interwoven stories...where we can engage in the inquiries that will help us understand the lives of people and the worlds they and we live within" (p. 20). By using this methodology, I am able to explore the complex inner workings of museums as educational spaces where users, in this case participant-artists, connect their own experiences and interests to learning, works of art, and the process of creating. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2008), when discussing narrative research, define this method as social practice, imagining "narrative structures as dynamic and evolving" (p. 383), "narrative as part of social practices inevitably lead to pluralized and fragmented notions" (p. 383), and lastly within narrative practice "people participate in multiple, overlapping and intersecting communities" (p. 383). By acknowledging these relationships and creating spaces for them to collide and interact, the museum becomes a site of multiple and varied perspectives.

Decolonizing Theory: Decolonized Methods and Performative Texts

Expanding, diversifying, and complicating narratives borrows strategies from decolonizing theories. Specifically, the ideas of Marcelo Diversi and Claudio Moreira (2009, 2012, 2013, 2014), are crucial to understand this study in that their collaborative efforts disrupt siloed and singular modes of inquiry; seek to investigate with audiences rather than about them; and acknowledge the position of authority and power that the researcher embodies. Within my own study, despite my best attempts to level hierarchies within museums and equitably share stories, I still contain undeniable authority in multiple contexts—that of an American citizen, a white woman, and museum employee.

Sites of pedagogical exchanges, such as classrooms and, by extension, art museums, can be spaces of decolonized learning. To this point, Diversi and Moreira (2013) assert that, “The classroom can be a place where these preconceived ‘truths’ can be examined, challenged, and transformed” (Diversi & Moreira, 2013, p. 471). It is within these environments “that we attempt to create and show possibilities of hope, of as many versions of a decolonizing utopia as we know” (Diversi & Moreira, 2013, p. 472). These deliberate acts of creating decolonized narratives spaces within art museums open the institution to multilingual complexities and varied utterances from audiences that are often ignored. Amy Lonetree (2012) discusses strategies of decolonizing museums in relation to indigenous populations and legacies of colonialism, however, her ideas can be extended to various populations who have been subjugated and produced through colonial power struggles—such as refugees. Engaging with multivocal narratives is one way for art museums to begin to decolonize museums “...through truth telling in exhibition spaces...” (Lonetree, 2012, p. 41) whereby traditionally silenced or ignored experiences are shared. Lonetree (2012) warns “But this does not happen overnight” (p. 165) and changing narratives and ways of practice within art museums is not immediate. It is in these ideas from Diversity and Moreira as well as Lonetree that *Museum as Sanctuary* is modeled as a decolonizing multivocal museum practice.

A LESSON IN PROCESS OVER PRODUCT

Multivocality itself is a decolonizing practice where through dialogue, collaboration, exchange, and a sharing of multiple ideas, there exists “...a dissembling of museum exhibits from static...to open-endedness and multivocality” (Tolia-Kelly, 2016, p. 907). However, this movement towards expanding institutional narratives can be messy and often does not adhere expected or traditional models of engagement.

I worry that within a museum we look and sound like chaos...

I feel like there is pressure to make an awesome product

Educator Reflections: October 8, 2013⁸

The above excerpt calls attention to my struggle between process and product when working within community-museum partnerships. Since this is a direct quote from the data collected for this study, I have formatted it in Arial in order to distinguish it within the text. My definition and understanding of the art museum’s purpose oscillates between the modernist and postmodern institution. This internal tension and anxiety plague my practice as an art museum professional working towards multivocal institutions and community-based programs. I must constantly remind myself to question whose aesthetic I am privileging when I worry about product.

From Modernist to Postmodern and Beyond

The modernist museum is the tradition I grew up in and where I learned to love museums and explore works of art. I expected white walls, perfectly spaced works of art, and guards watching over valuable objects. Brian O’Doherty and Thomas McEvilley (2004), in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, echo my own experiences with their description of the art museum where “an image

comes to mind of a white, ideal space that, more than any single picture, may be the archetypal image of twentieth century art" (O'Doherty & McEvilley, 2004, p. 14). These spaces of display, as O'Doherty and McEvilley suggest, are more ubiquitous than the works of art contained within the institutions. Thus, an inability to leave the modernist museum behind makes perfect sense.

Within these spaces, the museum's narrative is continuously impressed upon the visitor, regardless of the visitor's interests or objectives. As Carol Duncan (1995) elaborates, "even when visitors enter museums to see only selected works, the museum's larger narrative structure stands as a frame and gives meaning to individual works" (p. 12). More often than not, art museums tend toward a model of display where galleries are uncluttered and works of art have their own space in order to be revered and contemplated without competing with another work. This type of curatorial programming often minimizes or separates the educational component from the artwork itself, encouraging visitors to experience the work of art exclusively for its aesthetic value. The art object is set up to be the most important item in the museum program. As an art museum educator who grew up in these spaces, this memory and experience still permeates my conceptualization of the museum even when I intentionally shift away from this modernist aesthetic.

In contrast, the postmodern museum is one of action that Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000) says is "imagined as a process or experience" (p. 152). In such a space, exhibitions, visitors, and museum staff "negotiate responsiveness, encourage mutually nurturing partnerships, and celebrate diversity" (p. 153). There is room for holistic experimentation both within curatorial endeavors and educational programs, and process takes priority over product. In working with participant-artists in *Museum as Sanctuary*, the postmodern museum provided more opportunities for participant-directed experimentation and did not privilege my cultural expectations of art in either visiting the galleries or in studio settings. The postmodern museum "incorporate[s] personal narratives, collaboration, interplay between high and low culture, [and] multiple interpretations" (Tapia, 2008, p. 42) within the institution. Mixing narratives, creative techniques, and references to participant-artists' everyday lives in their gallery explorations and artmaking is multivocal, complex, and sometimes a little messy. In this new model, museums are becoming postmodern sites of multivocality by making space to tell multiple stories and truths.

Beyond this modern and postmodern divide, contemporary museum practitioners urge institutions to be socially and culturally responsive. For example, Dana Carlisle Kletchka (2018) posits a post-critical approach to museum pedagogy that is "...responsive to the communities that they serve and sensitive to and aware of the social conditions that shape community members' lives" (pp.308). Similarly, Patricia Lannes and Lauren Monsein Rhodes (2019) urge museums to become "...spaces of inclusion, cultural representation, and participation" (pp.6). These trends offer innovative solutions to engaging with the socio-cultural happenings of the contemporary moment and more inherently connected to local audiences and populations.

Navigating these tensions proves to be an ongoing battle. In art museums, engaging with both the product and process is important. However, in my experiences, we as art museum educators or educators often get bogged down in the product. The unique masterpiece and the aesthetically pleasing exhibition are our focus but we often forget that experimentation and learning can be chaotic and sometimes look less than perfect. As an art museum educator, I constantly encourage participants to experiment with their artmaking process; however, as an edu-curator I struggled to experiment in relation to exhibition development. Discovering ways to honor the process, as an edu-curator, is essential in order to really challenge existing practices in art museums and make way for community-based exhibitions like *Museum as Sanctuary*.

The two *Museum as Sanctuary* exhibitions (2013 and 2015) are examples of ways in which exhibition design can incorporate oral histories and diverse voices within curatorial program in order to broaden and diversify interpretation. In this way, the concept of multivocality questions what kind of expertise is being shared and how works of art are relevant in today's society. Christina Kreps's (2006) urge for cross-cultural exhibitions where "cross-culturally oriented approaches to curation are inherently about sharing curatorial authority and power, and making room for the inclusion of multiple forms of knowledge and expertise" (p. 469). For example, *MaS* experimented with installation approaches borrowing more from salon style hangings (constellations) rather than the modernist curatorial strategy of privileging or accenting a single object—asserting the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Reimagining the museum as a space of process and performance also extends to in-gallery learning within *MaS* where there is a move towards celebrating and respecting difference of opinions, backgrounds, and expertise.

GALLERY LEARNING AS A MULTIVOCAL PERFORMANCE

In the postmodern museum, exhibitions exist as spaces of exchange and dialogue, which encourage visitors to make connections between their own lived experiences and knowledge and the works of art on view. As museums strive to be more socially relevant, pedagogical shifts occur within gallery learning are positioning the audience as active in generating content. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1999), addresses how museumgoers are constantly incorporating their own experiences and knowledge into their in-gallery experiences. Ultimately, she explores the ways in which museums can begin to acknowledge the visitor's own meaning-making process outside of the museum's imposed grand narrative and curatorial mission. Borrowing from the model of communication developed by Hooper-Greenhill, the curriculum for *Museum as Sanctuary* focuses on how community-museum partnerships and refugee participants are exploring their own connections to works of art in the Museum's galleries. During this two-year study, each participant-artist was situated as "an active meaning-maker ..." (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. 17) wherein the museum experience is individualized, multiple, and active. Similar to this model of communication, the in-gallery activities in *MaS* position museum exhibitions and works of art on view as conversation starters, spaces of reflection, and ultimately the geneses of a cooperative "interpretative community" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p. 13).

Each of these gallery sessions, which last about one hour, are dedicated to small group work, where participants/visitors discuss works of art and share observations. Furthermore, these engagements are rooted in the belief that gallery-based learning is not static or stationary in front of a single work of art, but rather builds connection and dialogue among participants *and* artworks on view. These pedagogical experiments are designed to play with mobility within the galleries and exhibitions—leaning into the process and performance of learning.

Reflections on Facilitating Self-Directed Learning Experiences

During this time in the galleries, it became clear that participants were contextualizing the artworks they encountered in relation to their own lived experiences. Reinforcing Charles Garoian's (2001) assertion that "viewers bring their personal identities into play with the institution's dominant ideologies" (p. 236). For example, one refugee mother reflected how one work by Francisco Zungia titled *Four Women* reminded her of women in refugee camps, running from war. Another, when looking at Carlos

Merida's *Estampas del Popol Vuh* shared her own interpretation of the Mayan creation story since she had a similar background to the artist—both are from Guatemala with Mayan heritage. These exchanges made it clear that participants, when given the opportunities to build their own narratives will expand upon the traditional museum narrative that often rooted in art historical context. In-gallery learning thus can broaden the existing interpretation of exhibitions and works of art on view to include more voices, perspectives, and histories.⁹ Furthermore, these exchanges highlighted the ways in which "... participant interests, group dynamics, institutional layout, mishaps, varied paces, and my own goals/objectives as a museum educator"¹⁰ all influence museum learning. Within this context, museum learning and gallery exploration is a network of interconnected factors that influence outcomes. In-gallery learning becomes a collaborative process where shifting authorship conceptualizes the museum as a site of multiple encounters, where even disagreement and editing of a previous observation are possible. These collaborative pedagogical acts illustrate "moments of collective tuning, in the midst of a crowd or while working with a communal issue" (Minh-ha, 2011, p. 55). Within these instances, the art museum becomes a performance "composed of multiplicities" (Minh-ha, 2011, p. 73). These in-gallery exchanges are examples of negotiating tensions, hierarchies, and collective voice, where collaboration broadens interpretation into a multivocal performance.

Exquisite Corpse Activity

The *Exquisite Corpse* activity is a multi-visit in-gallery experience that positions visitors/participants as active meaning-makers who are developing connections to works of art on view in the museum's galleries, exhibitions, and permanent collections—bridging their experiences and knowledge with museum objects. This activity was initially designed as a strategy to build participant-artists' interest in gallery exploration with an item that was playful, creative, and did not resemble homework or an assignment. The *Exquisite Corpse* activity is derived from the Surrealist's creative experiments where each person contributes a drawing or phrase without knowledge of the previous addition (Museum of Modern Art, n.d.). By appropriating this practice and applying it to gallery experiences, I used this artistic strategy to intervene with the linear, cohesive, and singular perspectives that often are told within art museums. Instead, written object descriptions reflect a multiplicity of voice rather than the traditional sole authored institutional narrative. Additionally, the collaborative nature and single sentence contribution distances the writing prompt from a school setting, where there is pressure to give a right or a wrong answer—positioning the museum as a safe space for participant-artists who are also English-language learners to share their impressions without fear of judgement or revision.

When the activity begins, groups of between six to eight participants rotate through the works of art selected to create a collaborative poem/written description of an artwork. Each group is given five to ten minutes to develop a line in the poem; groups then rotate to the next work of art and add a new line. However, the time spent at each work is not strictly enforced – if groups are lingering in discussion or taking more time to come up with a sentence, the time can be, and should be, extended to respond to the needs and interests of the groups. At each artwork, the group discusses the work, collaboratively writes an interpretation/observation, conceals all but last word by folding the paper, leaving it for the next group to add to, and finally rotates to the next work. When given freedom to explore and reflect within the museum space, participant-artists are not impeded by what others say or a singular description about the artwork, which might come from a museum educator or didactic wall label. The open-ended

questions below were provided as suggestions with this activity, however, any open-ended question not in the list of examples could be used instead:

- What is going on in this work?
- What does it look like?
- What story does the work tell?
- What is the first thing that comes to mind when you look at this work? Explain.
- How does it make you feel? Explain.
- What is your favorite part? Why?
- What is your least favorite part? Why?

The resulting stories, rather than focusing on the biography of the artist or the historical context of the work of art, show ways in which visitors can make their own interpretations about what is going on. Perhaps more importantly, they allow for multiple interpretations of a work within a single description. There is no overarching institutional narrative providing a “truthful” interpretation; instead, there is flexibility and creativity within each story. Occasionally, these interpretative texts that are nonsensical poetic prose that show consensus and disagreement, and even document a group’s comfort to completely ignore activity instructions. In these exchanges, there is a “folding of complex and contradictory narratives into and through each other” where there exists “possibilities for engaging in democratic discourse, understanding alterity, and respect for cultural differences and peculiarities” (Garoian, 2011, p. 158). When read in front of works of art, these *Exquisite Corpse* descriptions become opportunities to share with the group and listen to other interpretations that may differ from one’s own ideas. These collaborative accounts sometimes clarify content, imagine narratives occurring within the artwork, and veer in new directions or previously uncharted territory. Trends within the data include:

- Describing the visual content of works
- Developing a story to explain the work
- Focusing on artistic technique and process

An example of this performance can be seen in the collaborative description written in response to a painting by Merrill Mahaffey entitled *Deep Canyon Morning* from 1984. At the time of the activity, this painting was included in a permanent collection exhibition entitled “Southwest Anthems,” exploring landscapes and environments in works from the Art of the American West collection. In this horizontally oriented polychrome landscape painting, Mahaffey depicts the canyon walls, ranging in hue from red to green, along the Colorado River, as well as the mirrored surface of the water as it moves through the rock formations. While the canyon walls take up the majority of the painting while the bottom fourth is of a quiet and reflective river; in the upper left-hand corner, a blue sky is punctuated with white clouds. Figure 5 depicts one group from *MaS* discussing this painting during the session.

Below, is the full the participant-written text, which appears in a sans serif font (Arial) in order to distinguish it within the chapter; Arial will be used frequently for the remainder of this chapter to distinguish participant voice and excerpts from the data.

Merrill Mahaffey

Figure 5. Documentation of group dynamics and interactions during Exquisite Corpse activity from November 18, 2014

Source: Used with permission of author, 2014

