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Phyllis Rabineau, President, NAME

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Darcie Fohrman's session **Silverbacks and Young Bloods Debate the Future of Exhibitions** was a compelling session that was referred to throughout, and since, the conference. Here artist Alice Hsieh gives us a comical illustration of a silverback gorilla and a young blood in an exhibition setting. ©Alice Hsieh www.geocities.com/jarajel



from the president

Phyllis Rabineau
President

Phyllis Rabineau is the Vice President for Interpretation and Education at the Chicago History Museum. She may be contacted at rabineau@chicagohistory.org.

Dear Colleagues:

This issue of *Exhibitionist* includes the guidelines and entry announcement for the 19th Annual Exhibition Competition. I urge you to review these materials, and I encourage you to enter your projects in the competition. This year the organizers made several significant changes to the entry process, with the goal of making it easier and more attractive for you to participate.

- **Streamlined format:** This year, instead of requiring a large number of printed copies, entries will simply be submitted in electronic format (burned to CD-ROM), with just one print copy that can be displayed at the AAM conference in Chicago.
- **New questions:** We've changed several requirements to focus less on the development/design process, and more on the exhibit itself, the audience, their experience, and outcomes.
- **Reduced length:** Without sacrificing important content, we are encouraging more concise answers that will be easier for you to prepare, and more efficient for judges to review.
- **New budget worksheet:** Recognizing that it can be difficult to come up with a format that works for all projects, we hope this year's worksheet is clear and easier-to-use.

As well as simplifying the entry process, we are also working to give all submissions greater exposure at the AAM conference in Chicago. At a special Marketplace of Ideas session, printed copies of all entries will be displayed, and we are also working with AAM to provide technology so we can show images from all the exhibit walk-throughs that are entered. At the Marketplace, we will encourage dialogue about what makes an excellent exhibition, including a graffiti wall for your comments on excellence, and on great exhibitions you have seen. This year, the award session itself will provide ample opportunity for winning entrants to speak about their projects.

NAME sought your input on the competition through the recent members' survey, and I'm aware of the concerns many of you voiced about it. Hopefully the changes introduced this will begin to re-focus the competition so that it truly reflects excellence in the field. Although implementing change is difficult in the context of a partnership such as the one that drives this competition (it is a joint effort of NAME, the Curators' Committee [CurCom], the Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation [CARE], and the Education Committee [EdCom]), the sponsors are committed to continual evaluation, and we will continue to make changes, if necessary, to improve this program changes based on this year's results.

Beth Redmond-Jones
Guest Editor

from the guest editor



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In the fall of 2005, the **Exhibitionist** printed articles based on NAME-sponsored AAM conference sessions. The response was overwhelming. Members sent us emails and called us up, thanking us for bringing a little bit of AAM to them at home and work, and for documenting some of the stimulating sessions that caused a buzz around the conference.

As a result of this success, we're doing it again. The 2006 conference sessions were stellar. We want to acknowledge the many hours of hard work by NAME's program chair, Tamara Biggs, and the program committee, shaping of these sessions for submission to AAM. But most of all, a big thank you goes to all the session chairs and presenters. Their dedication to the field, their practice, and their meaningful presentations, made these NAME-sponsored sessions the talk of the conference.

I hope this issue recaptures some of those great sessions. For those of you who were unable to attend in 2006, I hope these compelling articles trigger new ideas and encourage you to join the discussion next year.

A great deal of work went into compiling this issue and many thanks are due. First, I would like to thank the authors for their time adapting their presentations into articles. Second, thanks to Penny Jennings for assisting with editing the articles, to Bill Dambrova for his attention to detail in laying out this issue, and to Alice Hsieh for her beautiful illustrations.

Happy reading...

Beth Redmond-Jones

Kevin Schlesier is Exhibits and Outreach Librarian at the North Carolina State University Libraries. He may be contacted at Kps529@msn.com.

As a new father, the opportunities to go exploring my new home state of North Carolina have been few and far between these past months. Having visitors in town is always a good excuse for heading out of the house, so when my sister came to town, we headed to the Chapel Hill Museum to see their permanent exhibition *Carolina in My Mind: The James Taylor Story*. It was a fitting trip, as the first concert I attended was with my sister to see James Taylor at the New York State Fair. The museum is the former Chapel Hill Public Library, and the layout provides them with a large open area, which they have divided into different exhibitions. The Taylor exhibit sat in the corner, a collection of family photos and icons pasted to the wall and several plinths. Highlights include his Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Trophy, his Grammy for the "Hourglass" album, photographs, and documents from his early life in Chapel Hill. A large flat screen television played interview clips from various documentaries on repeat.

The exhibition was small, and the production was, well, simple. Text was printed on paper, and much of his career was covered in a scrap book created by a local fan. Yet somehow it seemed fitting. It was a town celebrating one of its "greatest favorite sons". Personal mementos such as report cards and photos gathered from Taylor's mother by the museum director were presented proudly, and while its homespun feel may be more the result of budget realities rather than an intended interpretive approach, it drove the message home that Taylor—often linked to Martha's Vineyard and Boston—was, and is, a part of the Chapel Hill community.

Eugene Dillenburg sent me a link that has allowed me to virtually visit countless museums during my lunch breaks. *The Museum of Online Museums* (<http://www.coudal.com/moom.php>) is a perfect way to spend a rainy afternoon, or a boring conference call. This site is edited by Coudal Partners, who describe themselves as a "design, advertising and interactive studio

in Chicago" who present their site "as an ongoing experiment in web publishing, design and commerce." The site has a beautiful layout and is divided into three sections: "Museum Campus", "Permanent Collection", and "Galleries, Exhibitions and Shows". According to the site, "The Museum Campus contains links to brick-and-mortar museums with an interesting online presence. The Permanent Collection displays links to exhibits of particular interest to design and advertising. Galleries, Exhibition, and Shows is an eclectic and ever-changing list of interesting links to collections and galleries, most of them hosted on personal web pages."

The sites run from such well known places as the MoMA, to the not so well known Museum of Early LCD Watches. The featured sites often include innovative ways of displaying collections. Some have collections of things that are off beat, such as the Museum of Batman Onomatopoeia (great computer wallpaper potential). Personal favorites include Dana's Museum of Unusual LP Art, The American Package Museum, and the Museum of Old Soviet Radios.

Speaking of odd collections, Ms. Cohoon of Independence, Missouri has collected 159 wreaths and over 2,000 pieces of jewelry containing, or made of, human hair dating before 1900. She displays these in *Leila's Hair Museum* (<http://www.hairwork.com/leila/>). The museum's web site explains, "Cohoon began collecting the hair as a hobby when she started the Independence College of Cosmetology 37 years ago. The wreaths, many hanging in their original frames, were considered pieces of art. Families put their hair on the wreath in a horseshoe shape so that more could be added as the family grew. Cohoon has a couple of the hair wreaths from two sisters whose heads were shaved when they entered a convent. She has a homemade family history book dating from 1725 to 1900 that contains samples of the family member's hair, complete with calling

cards.” For those of use who have a hard time relating the past to the present, Ms. Cohoon says, “We still have the habit today of saving hair: when Baby gets that first haircut, Mother saves the hair. We don’t know why; we just put it in a book and that’s the end of it...but at least we have the habit.”

The **Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum**, featuring state of the art “Exhibit Journeys”, holograms, and a mock-video of Tim Russert covering the 1860 election, received a great deal of press both positive, and negative, upon its opening. Getting quite a bit less attention is the Presidential Pet Museum in Lothian, Maryland. According to its web site (http://www.presidentialpetmuseum.com/Pet_Museum.htm) the museum houses the world’s largest collection of presidential pet memorabilia. The **Presidential Pet Museum** was founded as a repository and means of preserving information, artifacts, and items related to the Presidential Pets. The Museum was remodeled in 2002 and is now open to the public for all to view and enjoy. Over 500 items of interest are displayed for lovers of pets, Presidents, and pet trivia.” Conveniently the Presidential Pet Museum is located only 19 miles from the White House, and I am quite sure the lines at the pet museum are much shorter then at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, and of course, pets are welcome.

From correspondent Diane Gutenkauf comes the following tales from California: “My husband and I visited the **National Steinbeck Center** in Salinas, CA, in May. My husband is a reluctant museum attendee and I had already dragged him through several museums earlier in the week. We were on our honeymoon and this was my idea of a good time. Anyway...We both really enjoyed this museum. Located in the heart of Salinas, it occupies a new building and boasts two main exhibitions: **John Steinbeck Exhibition Hall** and **Valley of the World**. We spent most of our time in the exhibit about Steinbeck’s life and writings but did take a quick tour of “Valley of the World” to learn

more about agriculture in the region.

We both enjoyed the Steinbeck exhibition, a permanent installation exploring Steinbeck and his writings. In a series of immersive settings, we learned about influences on Steinbeck’s life from lettuce farming to cannery row. My husband particularly enjoyed viewing clips of movies made from Steinbeck’s writings. I loved coming around a corner and discovering a red pony waiting for me in his stall. I wished I was a small child again so I could climb on his back.

The exhibition moves through the depression with scenes from **The Grapes of Wrath** and an opportunity to view film clips from the movie. Then on to Cannery Row and audio clips of seagulls enhance the experience. Other exhibits explore Steinbeck’s experiences in Mexico and the Sea of Cortez, and as a correspondent during World War II. After the war, the exhibition explores Steinbeck’s travels across America. One of my favorite objects is a camper he used during his **Travels with Charley series**.

The exhibition ends with a recreation of his writing studio and an invitation for visitors to enter the space and lift the blotter to discover notes left by the author and discovered after his death by his widow.

The exhibition is rich and we spent about two hours exploring it. Unfortunately this left little time in our schedule for **Valley of the World**. Ever the museum-goer, I couldn’t leave with out at least a cursory overview. The exhibit title comes from a Steinbeck phrase; he referred to the Salinas Valley as the **Valley of the World**. The exhibit explores agriculture and Salinas Valley people--growers, laborers, and consumers of produce. It was interesting with some fun hands-on, like climbing into a life-size semi cab. We’ll have to go back and do this exhibit justice next time.”

(continued from page 5)

As a native New Yorker who has just relocated to North Carolina via Virginia, I find myself more immersed in the culture and memory of the Civil War than ever before in my life. Therefore, I loved the images sent to by Phyllis Rabineau from *Dinosaur Kingdom* featured on the web site roadsideamerica.com. *Dinosaur Kingdom* features life sized dinosaurs made of fiberglass, as often seen along the pre-interstate highways of the 1950s. However it was the narrative developed around these dinos that really intrigued me. See these aren't your run of the mill terrible lizards. They are Union soldier eating dinosaurs. According to the web site the scene is set in 1863, when the Union soldiers hoped to use the dinosaurs, which were found by a family in Virginia digging a mine shaft, as a weapon against the South. Like all good 'man uses nature for evil' stories, it doesn't turn out well for the soldiers, and the ensuing carnage is what the visitors find themselves looking at.

Speaking of dinosaurs and men, the *Creation Museum* in Kentucky received a great deal of media attention. My favorite museum list serve, Museum-L, had quite a long discussion about the pros and cons of such a museum. However one feels about the content, it will be interesting to see how this well funded organization uses traditional and non-traditional museum exhibition technologies and methods to get its message across. According to the web site, "The 50,000 sq. ft. Creation Museum will proclaim the Bible as supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice in every area it touches on. Set to open in 2007, this 'walk through history' museum will counter evolutionary natural history museums." I hope that one of our members will be able to attend and send me news about this new "museum".

That's all for now, please keep sending me tales of your adventures by emailing me at kps529@msn.com. ☀

WORDS From a “Young Blood”

by Sean Hooley



The NAME fellowship enabled me to attend the 100th anniversary of AAM, where I met many of the professionals in the field of exhibits whose work I had read, or read about. I spoke with accomplished exhibit designers and developers about my Masters Project on aquarium interactives and saw a wide variety of sessions from “The Latest in Exhibit Trends” to “Silverbacks and Young Bloods Debate the Future of Exhibition.” Many events, even the 7:00 am NAME breakfast, were fun and made it easier for me as a “Young Blood” in the field to talk to others with more experience.

However, I think the best part of AAM, besides going visiting Fenway Park during an exhibit design firm-sponsored cocktail hour, was meeting other museum professionals entering the field. While I have gotten to know many great people through my studies at John F. Kennedy University, there are so many different interests among the people in museum studies

programs that you might not have the same specific professional interests as any of them. While important to understand the breadth of the field, it was exciting to talk with students and recent museum studies graduates at schools in places like Texas, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania who had similar interests. It was also interesting to learn about the different coursework and training they had undertaken.

Perhaps in the future, NAME could attempt to facilitate more interaction among the new entrants to the field at both national and regional conferences by organizing social and professional opportunities aimed at “Young Bloods.” Without sounding too greedy, a representative in NAME’s organization for students and new entrants to exhibition work could help make this possible. I would like to thank NAME for allowing me to attend the conference and NAME sponsored events. ✨



NAME's President, Phyllis Rabineau, with scholarship winner Sean Hooley, recent graduate of the Museum Studies Program at John F. Kennedy University. ©Eugene Dillenburg



Letter to the Editor

from Eugene Dillenburg

In your most recent issue, Jay Rounds argues that the exhibit medium as we know it is running out of creativity and is about to go extinct—a theme I heard echoed at the recent AAM conference. Such statements would be more troubling if they weren't so very familiar.

To draw an analogy from another field: the same week that the *Exhibitionist* arrived, my local TV critic wrote an article about *The death of the sitcom*. The recent disappearance of such shows as *Will & Grace*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *Fraiser*, and *Friends* led her to conclude that the form had no more to offer. Unfortunately for her thesis, I had read that exact same article back in the early '90s, when the end of *Cosby*, *Cheers*, and other shows caused an earlier generation of critics to also declare the sitcom dead. And again around 1980, when *Mary Tyler Moore*, *Bob Newhart*, and *All in the Family* called

it quits. And again ten years before that...

In other words, the business is clearly cyclical. Every ten to fifteen years, a group of highly-regarded shows all run out of steam at about the same time, leaving a vacuum. And within a season or two nature, as is her wont, fills that vacuum with the next brace of hits.

So too with exhibits. I see little evidence that exhibits are less creative now than during some imagined golden age of the past. But even if they were, I would wager it represented a temporary slump rather than the exhaustion of the medium as a whole. ☀

Eugene Dillenburg
Exhibit Developer
Science Museum of Minnesota

Silverbacks and Young Bloods

Debate the Future of Exhibitions

by Darcie Fohrman

In the gorilla world, the Silverback is the strong, dominant troop leader. In this session, three Young Bloods—the best and the brightest from a new generation of exhibition professionals—stood up to three Silverbacks (experienced exhibition professionals) on issues we all confront when planning and designing interpretive exhibitions. We encouraged the audience to compare and contrast their points of view with us.

The session was designed to stimulate thought-provoking and entertaining debate and discussion from beginning to end. **Provocateur Paul Martin**, Vice President of Exhibits at the Science Museum of Minnesota, announced the debate rules and facilitated the session. Each Silverback gave a 3-minute position statement on the future of exhibitions, followed by a rebuttal from a Young Blood. A three-foot diameter digital stopwatch was projected on a screen at the front of the room to track time. Once the positions were stated, the audience was invited into the debate, resulting in lively, thoughtful, provocative, often funny presentations, and real-time interchange and debate.

The first **Silverback, Kathleen McLean**, Principal of Independent Exhibitions, provoked us by asking, “Are museum exhibitions headed for a mass extinction?” She thinks exhibitions might be “on an evolutionary dead-end, unless we can encourage them to adapt significantly to this new environment called the 21st century.” She described a day spent museum-going with Young Blood Erika Kiessner, wondering why a videogame arcade and a jazz club were more engaging and energizing than the museums they visited. Her message: “Museums and their exhibitions need to get with it and evolve.”

Young Blood Erika Kiessner, Exhibit Developer at the Ontario Science Centre, countered with the proposal that museums should return to “the good old days, before I was born, with the museums of the past as the ideal of the future. I dream of museums where people go to learn. I dream of museums as being a special event that people respect. I dream of museums as places where people go to be social. I dream of experts and lay people meeting and conversing, mediated through artifacts, display, and context.

“To this end I say cast off the shackles of the computer screen! Fear not lengthy copy! Resist the allure of oversimplification! Close your ears to the siren song of corporate sponsors! We should put the people back into the museums. If our halls have people in them who can answer questions and share information, our visitors won’t be intimidated by copy. People keep things interesting and give a personal touch to every visit. People empower and share enthusiasm. The strength of the museum over other entertainment mediums is that it can be a social experience if we keep it that way.”

“Avoiding isolationist technologies, like handheld tours and computer monitors, will be key to keeping people coming through our doors. If we add a liberal helping of friendly experts to the mix, we have a recipe for giving people an experience they can’t find anywhere else and will hopefully seek out.”

Silverback Darcie Fohrman, Exhibition Developer/Designer, proposed that “we should be striving for an aesthetic experience in all types of exhibitions. We plug information into a formula of goals, and messages, and labels and flips and buttons – but where’s the soul?”

Darcie Fohrman is the Principal of Darcie Fohrman Associates. She may be contacted at darcie4man@earthlink.net.

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Rarely is the whole exhibition powerful, memorable, or transforming. I believe that's because exhibition designers are *not* rising to the occasion. We aren't creating an inspiring aesthetic experience—described by John Dewey as: “valuable and enjoyable; vividly felt and subjectively savored, absorbing us and focusing our attention on its immediate presence; a meaningful experience, not just sensation; and a distinctive and memorable experience that might challenge our assumptions and have universal appeal.” Shusterman, Richard, “The End of Aesthetic Experience”, published in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55 (1999), 29-41.

“So why aren't Exhibition Designers rising to this challenge and creating aesthetic experiences? Are designers abdicating because

it's messy and time consuming to get immersed in the content? Do directors and managers understand and appreciate the role of the designer as interpretive planners? Are exhibit developers taking over and keeping them out?”

“I do think an unintended consequence of creating the role of exhibit developer is that many designers either aren't given the opportunity, or they choose not to collaborate in concept development. We're back to the curatorial driven model of exhibition planning where each player is in a narrowly defined role. This has bred a generation of designers who aren't immersed in the content. They design a “look” but not a “feel.” To avoid mediocre exhibitions, designers must be inspired by the topic—we can't know who might respond passionately to our work—but we need to create it with passion.”

Young Blood Dana Schloss, a graduate student in the Museum Exhibition Planning and Design program at University of the Arts, agreed that perhaps “the way we are making exhibits is becoming too structured. I agree with Darcie that a developer model with increased power can undermine a team approach and does seem similar to a curatorial model.” She thinks we really need to buy into our projects “to be able to inspire people.”

Silverback Lou Casagrande, President and CEO of The Children's Museum in Boston, feels that (stated hyperbolically, of course) “Exhibitions have become obscenely expensive and exhibit developers increasingly lazy about using creative, low tech ideas to interpret great objects and tell powerful stories. I have watched us become more dependent on expensive technology, more willing to outsource

almost everything—from development, design, and curatorship to label writing and programming—so that now only the richest museums with the best corporate donors can produce so called “high-quality” shows.

“This escalating price tag has meant that organizers have needed to ask for 7-figure sponsorships, big rental fees, and employ the “world tour” blockbuster approach. Such escalation of cost and hype has also invited all kinds of ethical controversy, as sponsors make sure that they are getting their bang for their buck. I say, let’s reinvest in minor league baseball and let more people play—and let more ordinary folks afford seats in the stands!!”

Young Blood Joy Bivins, Curator at the Chicago Historical Society, is “concerned that in our technological, fast-paced, attention-deficient society that exhibitions will cease to matter. As Mr. Casagrande pointed out, exhibitions are *very* expensive ventures and museums are up against stiff competition. How then can we prepare ourselves to deal with that reality along with the reality of shrinking, mainly staff, resources? Given the financial commitment many exhibitions require and in some instances, unequal pay-off in the form of mediocre attendance, how can we make exhibitions the choice for audiences?”

“I say we need to prepare ourselves to move beyond the walls of the gallery and push the envelope in interpreting both stories and objects. Ultimately, we need to think of exhibitions as less static long-term products. Unfortunately, this may cost more money! It is my assertion that we will not attract audiences if we do not wow them and embed

our objectives and big ideas in the kind of flash and technology many people (mainly youth who need to be stated as our primary audiences more than they are) are used to. I am not arguing that all exhibitions need to follow this model but more often than not they must if we are going to keep up and remain relevant.”

Post-Session Thoughts From the Presenters

Kathy McLean:

“While Erika and I tried to disagree, in the spirit of debate that the session demanded, there really wasn’t much disagreement between us. We both tried very hard to engage with the exhibitions we visited, and both got tired of trying. One thing that troubled me during the general discussion was the assumption among some people in the room, that the making of museum exhibitions is, first and foremost, a business. I disagree.”



(continued from page 11)

Erika Kiessner:

"I thought it was neat that there seemed to be more disagreement among the young bloods than between us and the silverbacks. It felt like we all shared a common desire to see museums thrive, and everyone had a vision of a time when museums are as valued and loved as we think they should be. But the path we want to take to this vision seems to vary greatly. There were many shared values between the generations, which is encouraging. So it appears that we are on the brink of change for the museum world. As we try to regain our visitors in the face of changing technology and the demands of entertainment, a wide variety of strategies will be tested by those who are fresh to the field. With that variety we should have a better product to offer our visitors who will reward us with their presence, hopefully."

Darcie Fohrman:

"In response to my concern about getting more people early in their career to attend the AAM Annual Meeting (which was my impetus for organizing this session), Joy said that 'it all goes back to an institution's commitment to professional development and that seems to be lacking out there. It is the first to go, as budgets get tight. I think it is important to encourage young professionals to meet with people who do what they do in their own region and hopefully, they will get the opportunity to come to an AAM annual meeting eventually. I think the idea of a reduced registration fee is great, but institutions also seem to be more keen on sending people when they are presenting so maybe working on getting more younger professionals to be on panels would help as well.' Those new to the field bring energy and insight that help us out of our ruts."

Dana Schloss:

"The Silverbacks and Young bloods were in agreement much more than I expected us to be. Everyone basically agreed that exhibits are lacking some amount of "soul" that we expect they should have. We all examined the problems from different and illuminating angles, which created a lively discussion after the panel and the rest of the conference with people on the panel and some folks who otherwise I might not have met. And while the session definitely inspired a good conversation, I think we needed more debate and disagreement. We should probably add an arm wrestling component next time."

Lou Casagrande:

"I guess I would just say that I felt that both silverbacks and young bloods agreed that we need to put the 'soul' back into exhibitions—that money and technology will not replace creativity and experimentation."

Joy Bivins:

"I was rather surprised at my fellow young bloods thoughts about returning to the museum of yesteryear because I am not sure that what we would be returning to would be better than what is currently exists. I think there is plenty to look forward to in the future if we are willing to do the work. I also had a pretty visceral response to the notion that the young bloods were not willing to take risks, as one of the audience members stated. I think that, in general, we should all be more concerned with excellence than risk. In general, I think risk and innovation are inextricably tied to excellence.

"I really liked Beverly's [Serrell] point about guidelines that help us prevent missed opportunities. I think if there are bibliographies

that include articles, essays, and books that experienced professionals feel lost without, they should share them with their less experienced counterparts. I think we should all learn to have more fun with our work and draw from a variety of sources. One woman mentioned that business should not be a bad word and I agree with her in the sense that museums should really become more wed to long-term planning. This is something I often feel is missing from my own projects and I think I would benefit, be less stressed, and have more time to be creative if planning were a priority.”

Paul Martin:

“The power of this session was not so much in the content of each panelist’s presentation as it was in the format to provoke thought and discussion among everyone in the room. The

session was planned so there would be more time for debate and conversation with the members of the audience than there was for presentations. There were a lot of suggestions about using this format for other conversations as well: small museums and large museums, art museums and science museums, developers and designers. And what about those who are neither Silverbacks nor Young Bloods? Based on the feedback I got after the session the format of engaging in debate and conversation with multiple opinions coming to play on a topic or new topics being inserted early on in the session and throughout it was successful. If the number of people and the amount of time they spend hanging out talking in groups after the session is a good indicator of the success of a session then this session was pretty successful. ☀

Passing the Torch, Keeping it Lit

A Summary of the session *What's Going On VII: Hot Topics in Exhibit Development*

by *The Exhibit Profession as a Whole*

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This article is a free-ranging conversation

For that reason, we consider the entire audience of the session to be the authors of this article. These aren't Paul's or Janet's words and ideas—they came from everybody.

Wherever possible we've made attribution. We apologize for any misspellings. Also, this article is not a direct transcript. Comments have been grouped according to several common themes, and have been edited for length and clarity.

Generations

*the koi lays its eggs
the pond is large, dark and cold
the koi swims away*

Every year, near the end of the AAM conference, NAME hosts a session entitled *What's Going On? Hot Topics in Exhibits*. There, the session leaders facilitate a free-ranging conversation on a topic selected by the audience themselves.

This year, the buzz of the conference was set by one of the first sessions. *Silverbacks and Youngbloods Debate the Future of Exhibitions* displayed a sharp difference in attitudes between newcomers to the exhibits field and the old hands. After pondering these issues for several days, the audience at *What's Going On?* voted to continue the discussion.

Silverbacks and Young Bloods

Paul kicked things off by noting that, at the earlier session, there had been more debate within generations than between them; the old-timers and the newbies seemed to agree on a lot of things.

Benjamin Filene of the University of North Carolina argued that old vs. young is not necessarily a helpful distinction. It merely perpetuates stereotypes and promotes cliquishness. It would be more helpful to view exhibit professionals in terms of training received, technical skill, and ways our experiences in the field have been different, beyond simple longevity. Phyllis Rabineau of the Chicago History Museum concurred, noting that some of her mentors had been people the same age as her, but with different experience.

Deb Wool, Curator at the Delaware Agricultural Museum and Historic Village, concurred: we are labeling ourselves. Being a good exhibits worker is not about age, and it's not about the size of your institution. It's about the audience—that moment when a visitor interacts with what you produced. It's about knowing the theory, understanding what works.

Hadley Schmoyer, Curator at The Portland (Maine) Harbor Museum, said the question isn't how can older workers help the younger ones, but rather how can we help each other? What fresh ideas can the rookies bring in to inspire the veterans, oldsters? Tim Pfaff of Hilferty argued that the world is changing so rapidly, we need young and old workers to come together to properly interpret it.

(A second issue, which nobody followed up on, was: what about the folks in-between, who are neither gray beards nor wet behind the ears? Someone suggested calling them "Tweens," but later in the conference several of us decided we preferred the term "Prime," as in neither raw nor over-cooked.)

How do we foster newbies?

Paul asked what do we need to do to foster new folks and move the field forward? Renee Mensing-Solick, exhibit developer at The Science Museum of Minnesota, noted that a consequence of not of nurturing newcomers is that motivated people end up leaving the field.

“The buzz of the conference was... the sharp difference in attitudes between newcomers and old hands.”

Kathy Condon, another old-timer, noted that her new employees often find the amount of information on exhibits and exhibit theory overwhelming. They ask what's the most important part? What are the essential competencies? They need a roadmap, an outline.

Phyllis Rabineau, VP of Education and Interpretation at the Chicago History Museum, says silverbacks have a responsibility to the youngbloods: give them enough rope to hang themselves. Don't be too directive. Give them the tools they need and introduce them to the ideas, then let them make their own mistakes.

Carol Tang at the California Academy of Sciences said that she wanted to be part of the exhibit process but, as a part of the Education Department, she had difficulty getting in. She asked if there's a way she and other enthusiastic “exhibit junkies” could get involved and learn the ropes. For instance, an exhibits “boot camp” at AAM could be a safe place for novices to ask the basic questions.

Diane Felson, an educator in Savannah, Georgia, had a similar experience. She was involved in exhibit development, but “only a week before the exhibit goes up.” She, too, would love to be more involved, but is stretched too thin. Institutions need to understand priorities, and see how true collaboration between all departments will make everyone happier, and lead to better exhibits.

Lisa Jacobs of the Museum of Surveying in Lansing, Michigan, noted that if you're not directly related to the exhibit field, you don't get the training. (One might argue that there's not a lot of training for those directly related,

either.) At a state museum conference, you can rub elbows with pros who have exhibits training and just talk. This is better than attending sessions at large conferences where talking heads just preach at you.

Mike Sarna, soon-to-be Head of Interpretation at the Natural History Museum in London, England, faces the challenge of empowering his staff. It's a bit discouraging to keep hearing about best practices and formulas. Can we put some of the chaos and individual creativity back into the exhibit process? (As Paul Martin has said in other contexts, “some of my worst work was the cleanest.”)

John Jaeger of Designing Eye noted that, back in his day, exhibits wasn't a profession you trained for. Most entered “through the back door.” Paul implored we try to keep the back door open.

Rick Riccio, a designer with 30 years' experience, also teaches at a museum studies program. He is also active in COMPT, AAM's Committee on Museum Professional Training. He noted there are lots of educational programs available these days. You can learn more about them on the COMPT website at <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/art/compt.html>. And to see what effect they are having on the exhibits field, see the article *We Don't Need No Education: The Struggle for Museum Training* in the Spring 2006 issue of the *Exhibitionist*.

What's the matter with old-farts?

(This turned out to be the lengthiest part of the discussion. How like Baby Boomers, to turn every conversation toward themselves.)

Kevin Schleiser of the North Carolina State University Libraries noted that, when he began

“Where’s the fun?”

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“Have the old-timers grown bitter and resentful? Have we lost our muse? How do we stop making ourselves miserable?”

attending AAM conferences several years ago, the silverbacks were “guiding spirits,” arguing that exhibits can do great and wonderful things. But today, “the silverbacks seemed uber-pessimistic about the field, while the youngbloods were optimistic.” What happened? Have the old-timers grown bitter and resentful, having sold out to take non-creative administrative positions? Have we lost our muse? How do we stop making ourselves miserable?

Janet Kamien responded that she, personally, hadn’t lost her muse. But if she sometimes seems pessimistic, she blames it on having had to “live through” 40 years of elected officials playing politics with federal arts funding.

Barbara Franco, CEO of the Pennsylvania Historical Museums Commission, disagreed with Kevin. She argued that it can be just as creative to be an administrator, but in a different way—you are creating an environment where other people can safely explore their own creativity. It can be very rewarding. It’s important to think of your entire career as being creative.

Sonal Baht of the Wildlife Conservation Society, New York, is one of those in-between people who feels she is starting to lose her soul. “After getting crushed down enough times, I simply stop putting new ideas out there.” People who’ve been in the business for a long time keep saying that won’t work; we did it before; we don’t have time to think about it; it costs too much; we can’t take chances. Mostly, the old designers get really upset when people suggest they may be wrong. But maybe the old rules don’t apply any more? The audience we are trying to reach is different; so too are the workers trying to reach them.

Several audience members echoed this. Evelyn Bauer, a Harvard grad student, says her questions are frequently met with “We’ve always done it that way.” Gene noted that, when he worked at The Field Museum, the common response to new ideas was “We tried that 20 years ago.” One audience member related how an intern asked her how long should you stay at a job? Her answer: until you start saying “we tried that, it can’t be done.” A few years later, she took her own advice. We need self-discipline to know when it’s time to leave. If not, then you may create difficult situations, both for yourself and for your institution.

Tamara Biggs said that in her previous job many things made her unhappy, which is how she knew it was time to go. In her current job, again many things make her “profoundly unhappy” and ready to quit. But her boss helped see her through. “It’s important to have that anchor. It’s still hard, but I’m glad I stayed.”

Phyllis Rabineau (who just happens to be Tamara’s boss at the Chicago History Museum) says her advice is: don’t take on other people’s karma. You will always hear people complain. But you need to separate their issues (and your own issues) from the job.

Willard Whitson, the new VP for Exhibits at the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia, recalled starting out at a tiny museum in Birmingham, Alabama. Attending a workshop at the Smithsonian, he discovered that the issues that plagued him—small budgets, difficult co-workers—were universal in the field.

Judy Giuriceo of the Ellis Island Immigrant Museum said that low salaries and poor

“Let’s all descend on a museum en masse, and then go drinking afterwards.”

benefits are forcing many people to leave the museum field. Another attendee suggested lack of maternity leave may be keeping young women out.

Kris Danemeyer of Crown Design, Boston, suggested we can reinvigorate ourselves by getting back to the fundamentals. Exhibits are story-telling, and we can take inspiration from other forms of story: film, art, theater, TV. etc.

Matthew Martin, Matthew Martin Design Works, asked, “Where’s the fun?” If you’re not having fun, it won’t show up in your work. John Jaeger noted there’s always been a lot of crushing going on. You need to keep your passion for the work.

Irene Hensinger, CEO mid-sized museum in Michigan, said that, despite the frustrations, she finds satisfaction from being part of the glue that holds her community together, and helps them tell their stories.

Keeping the conversation going

Paul noted that the cool thing about the Silverback session was that, after it was over, people just hung around and talked to each other. They found common themes, and did not separate themselves by age. The pre-conference Exhibits Roundtable also helps people hook up with others who are struggling with the same issues. Lynne Friman of Envisions Design said she always gets juiced by the energy and ideas at conferences—what she called the “cross-pollination between generations” —but then she goes home and it all fades away. How can we keep the cross-pollination going?

Carol Tang said she would love the chance

to go through an exhibit with silverbacks and see what they think doesn’t work. Paul suggested that at next year’s AAM conference in Chicago, we should all descend on a museum en masse, and then go out drinking afterwards to discuss it. Cynthia Sharpe of Thinkwell Design volunteered to organize this. To participate, contact Cynthia at Csharp@thinkwelldesign.com.

Karen Pollard, another exhibit developer at The Science Museum of Minnesota, said we don’t have to wait until next year. There are lots of organizations out there at the regional, state and even city levels. If you can’t find one, you can start one on your own. You can get a lot of ideas simply by lurking on the listservs like Museum-L and ASTC-L.

Margie Marino, Executive Director of the North Museum of History and Science in Lancaster Pennsylvania, concurred. “It’s important to move around, get different perspectives, learn new ways. Every museum is fascinating and different and wonderful.” She finds small museums particularly inspiring, as more people get to do creative stuff. Paul agreed that small museums can teach the big guys a lot. Kristen Harbeson, VP of the Small Museums Association, noted that larger museums are coming to their annual conference, and learning how to do innovative things cheaply and quickly.

Dominic, an interpreter for the National Park Service, said we need to cross-pollinate not just between generations, but between fields and disciplines. He suggested we attend the National Association for Interpreters conference in Santa Fe (www.nai.org). Peter Jemison of the AAM Board remarked

“Many times, the best moments at a conference are simply talking to strangers on the bus.”

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how refreshing it is to hear the field engaged in such critical self-examination. He feels we need better programming at conferences to keep the field enthusiastic. He is discouraged by how uncreative many session proposals are.

Paul, Janet and Tamara all raised the challenge for audience members to propose better sessions for next year. And the best way to get a session on the conference program is to submit it through one of the Standing Professional Committees, such as NAME.

Serena Furman of Aspace, Boston, noted the real conversations happen between sessions,

or after hours. We need to be more active in inviting newcomers in to those discussions. Many times, the best moments at a conference are simply talking to strangers on the bus.

Conclusion

As with last year, there is no conclusion. We air the issues and start the conversation. It's our aim and our hope to inspire everyone to think about these ideas a little more deeply, and to share our thoughts with our colleagues. Let's continue the conversation next year in Chicago. ☀

Haiku

Every year, to provide an access point to session attendees who perhaps are a bit more right-brain dominant, Eugene Dillenburg composes haiku to encapsulate the issues proposed for discussion. Only one topic is chosen; the haiku for rejected ideas are below. These are written at 2:00 a.m. the night before; Paul, Janet and Tamara take no responsibility for the quality of this poetry.

The Power of Design

*stones in Zen garden.
move two inches to the left--
still a bunch of stones*

Business Models

*ox cart on mud road.
driver tries another route.
fog on the mountain*

Multi-modal Experiential Learning

*frog on lily pad
eyes the crane and contemplates
the interaction*

Art, History, and Science Museums: A Cross-Cultural Conversation

by Eric Siegel, Benjamin Filene, Deborah Schwartz and Jennifer MacGregor

The past century has witnessed the rise of distinct museums for art, history, and science. That trend has accelerated in the past twenty-five years with the dramatic expansion of science museums and the increasingly specialized museology of art and public history institutions. This session, designed as a conversation among leaders with experience in each of these fields, addressed what each of these fields might learn from each other, with an eye towards how tomorrow's museums might benefit from such cross-pollinations. The participants focused on mission, exhibitions, and interpretation, while considering the impact that these two core activities have on other aspects of the museum, such as audience development and strategic planning.

Eric Siegel, Executive Vice President for Programs and Planning of the New York Hall of Science, and session chair, framed the question as follows: "When I visit an art or history or science museum, what do I see there that I wish our institution could learn to do?" While not all of the presentations addressed this question specifically, they did each highlight the differences and convergences among these categories of museums. Rather than integrating the talks as a seamless narrative (which would misrepresent the session and the topic) this article presents summaries of each of the presentations prepared by the session panelists.

Eric Siegel, New York Hall of Science

To introduce the science center perspective, Eric showed a very short video taken the day before

the session at the Hall of Science. The session participants witnessed a typical science center day, kinetic and social, with an overwhelmingly young, minority audience. The video illustrated the several modes of learning that make up a science center experience, including self-guided inquiry, "Explainer" interaction with visitors, and hands-on workshops. While the Hall of Science is very proud of the diversity of audiences and modes of learning, Eric wondered how science centers might emulate some of the characteristics of art and history museums.

How might science centers gain an adult audience who stand still?

The science center audience is young and getting younger. While this offers many opportunities to the field, it would be good to broaden the range of ages participating in science center activities, with the concomitant broadening of learning styles.

How can science centers incorporate controversy?

History museum exhibitions have become a forum for examining the nature of history and the changing context of understanding historical events. Such exhibitions as *Mining the Museum* and *Slavery in New York* change the public understanding not only of historical events but of how history is written. Such radical self-examination has not been a characteristic of science centers.

How can science centers embrace ambiguity?

Fundamental to the engagement with art is the engagement with ambiguity of meanings. In science centers, lack of clarity of an exhibition is considered a failure; in contemporary art, multiple conflicting

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Can museums be funny? **The City Museum in St. Louis** has expanded the definition of what can happen in a museum.

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meanings is at the heart of the visitor's encounter with artworks. Similarly, the best history museum exhibitions incorporate the interleaving, conflicting strands of narrative that form our understanding of history.

What about Mortality? The effective and affecting exhibition *Open House: If These Walls Could Speak* at the Minnesota Historical Society evokes an awareness of our own mortality and fallibility. The implicit narrative of science centers is teleological and heroic, that human knowledge is enduring and that progress underlies all human endeavors.

Science Centers Exhibits are Never Funny.

For that matter, most museum experiences are not designed to evoke laughter, though irony and wit are valued resources for almost every other form of human expression.

Benjamin Filene University of North Carolina Greensboro

From 1997-2006, Benjamin served as an exhibit developer at the Minnesota Historical Society.

Exploring the relationship between history, art, and science museums is a chance to look at trends in contemporary practice but also as an opportunity to explore issues of institutional identity. What makes a history museum a history museum or a science center a science center? While some may bemoan over-specialization, I am more struck by the amount of cross-pollination. Within history museums, in fact, there has been so much borrowing

across the disciplines that I'm left asking, "What makes a history museum *different* from a science center or a children's museum?"

I'm speaking from the vantage point of a certain kind of history museum. The Minnesota History Center, the flagship building of the Minnesota Historical Society was built in 1992, at the beginning of a wave of large, state-sponsored history museums. Through the vision of people like Barbara Franco, the History Center set out to be visitor-friendly—a vibrant, accessible, relevant, and fun destination for school groups, tourists, and families. To reach visitors in this way, it had to break the stereotyped expectations for history museums as dusty repositories of do-not-touch signs. It had, in other words, to draw on lessons learned at other kinds of museums.

From children's museums, the History Center absorbed the insight that different visitors learn in different ways. Some learn by reading, but others learn by seeing, by hearing, by touching, or by participating kinesthetically. From science centers in particular, we learned the power of hands-on engagement, where visitors assume the role of explorers. From theater, we understood the importance of environment—that visitors pick up unspoken cues from their surroundings. From art museums, we absorbed lessons about the power of metaphor and juxtaposition—that the literal is not always the most powerful route to communication.

So the History Center became an amalgam of these influences from other museums. This mix has shaped the way we work and who does the work. We are a staff of generalists, with backgrounds not only in history but theatre, design, and education. We have "exhibit

“When I visit an art or history or science museum, what do I see there that I wish our institution could learn to do?”

developers” not “historians.” In the field as a whole, there is a similar blurring of boundaries as museum studies and public history programs train students to be experts in museum exhibits more than in specific content fields. Coincidentally or not, in recent years we have seen the rise of museums that transcend entirely the history- art-science-children’s museum boundaries: the City Museum in St. Louis, the Japanese American National Museum, and the Spy Museum.

In face of this fluidity, what’s left that makes history museums distinctive? Have we learned our lessons so well and expanded our scope so effectively that we don’t fit any niche? In the end, I feel, what makes history museums relevant are not the techniques they use but the sorts of stories they can tell. More than science museums and art museums, history institutions deal with content that is familiar, personal, and fundamentally human. They can look not only at cutting-edge pioneers, but the experiences of ordinary people swept up in cutting edge changes. Beyond exploring class, genome, and species or avant-garde and critics, history museums can explore the interplay between individuals and the community. And of course they are uniquely positioned to trace change over time, to show how events unfolded in often unforeseen ways that shaped present-day lives. Finally, with their emphasis on human-level stories, history museums have the ability to engage emotions and to personalize their stories. How did it *feel* to experience these changes? How do these stories from the past resonate with *your* story?

History museums have borrowed so liberally from other museum disciplines that we may at times seem nearly unrecognizable to ourselves,

but there is a vantage point, a mission, and a set of values that, I believe, gives history museums energy and, I believe, an ongoing place on the cultural landscape.

Deborah Schwartz, Brooklyn Historical Society

This presentation addressed the qualities and characteristics that are distinctive to an art museum. And how might the uniqueness of the art museum inform (if at all) our understanding of other types of museums?

I have functioned as art museum educator for most of my professional life. But, I have also curated an exhibition in a children’s museum, (a very powerful and influential experience) and now I am the president of a historical society. This puts me in a fascinating spot: what will I take with me from my years in art museums—what do I love about them, and what would I want to replicate now that I am liberated from that framework?

We’ll start with the obvious: the work of art. A work of art is usually (though not always) a unique object. A work of art often loses at least some of its power and meaning if replicated. It is a quintessential authentic experience—no reproduction, no facsimile, no copy will do. You can capture a symbol of it in a postcard, on a website, or in a PowerPoint, but nothing can replace the experience of the original work of art.

In an art museum visitors sometimes come to revisit paintings and artworks that they have seen before. People who frequent art museums often refer to this phenomenon as “visiting old

“Beyond exploring class, genome, and species or avant-garde and critics, history museums can explore the interplay between individuals and the community.”

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friends.” I *need* to go see Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*, or I *need* to revisit Seurat’s *La Grand Jatte*. A work of art can also be evocative. It can make us see the world in a way that we have never seen it before: Oscar Wilde said “There was no fog in London before Whistler painted it.”

Yet another aspect of visiting art museums is the discovery of the surprising, the unexpected, and sometimes works of art that you hate, that infuriate you. Let’s consider the work of The Chapman Brothers, for example. These provocateurs can be as satisfying as the old friends, because they make us think and they demand that we justify our outrage.

Yet another component of the art museum experience is the discovery of new and loved works of art—an artist we have never heard of before, whose work is magical—that transforms us. This transformative experience in an art museum can happen when you least expect it: When I was 10 years old and first saw the paper cut outs of Henri Matisse, or when I was 18 and saw the Japanese scroll paintings illustrating the *Tale of Genji*.

Now each of these magical moments, which took place in an art museum, has characteristics that are worth noting. Each experience is unique, highly personal, not necessarily connected to a larger story or narrative. These experiences, as Elaine Gurian has noted, were not learning experiences in any traditional sense, and my response to these works of art might or might not have prompted me to conduct further research, or learn in any explicit didactic sense.

There are of course opportunities to build knowledge, context, and history out from my

interaction with the work of art, but the point I want to make is that the reaction in itself was worthwhile—I was moved, excited, in body and spirit to believe in beauty, in the ability of human beings to be creative, to celebrate life and (perhaps a bit of a leap for others, but not for me) to work for a better world, because a world that has this much capacity to create, is a world worth preserving so that my children and their children can enjoy the fruits of the human spirit as much as I do or more.

To conclude, let’s go back to the original question: What might an art museum take from a history or children’s museum and visa versa? In a history museum we might seize the opportunity to build upon the excitement, the pleasure, and the indignation of looking at art and turn each of those into a teachable moment.

I used to think that the profession should leave the distinctive art museum experiences in their place. That we should not try to replicate them, that we should leave art in its non-narrative and authentic space at the art museum. But I believe I was wrong. Our understanding of history does not have to be exclusively in traditional narrative form. Indeed, it is through works of art by Fred Wilson and Glen Ligon that I believe many people can begin to think more clearly about our history—slavery, racism, and the civil rights movement. These are works of art about the human condition, and if that isn’t an essential piece of history, what is?

Art museums are places of quiet, reflection, provocation, and visual discovery. And while our science and history museums do not necessarily state these characteristics as essential to their mission (at least not the quiet part!) the infusion of these characteristics might



The Grafter's Shack by J. Morgan Pruett is part of Wave Hill's explorations of the intersection of nature and art.

well add intriguing components to their already impressive achievements.

Conversely, to those of you who work in art museums I make a plea that you become less afraid of context, of history, and of information sharing. Providing those things to your public will not ruin your great works of art. They are too powerful and cannot be diminished by giving people a context for which to understand them.

Jennifer MacGregor, Wave Hill

Wave Hill, one of New York City's best-kept secrets, is a 28-acre public garden and cultural center that offers programs in horticulture, environmental education, woodland management, and the visual and performing arts. Although its collections are living plants and trees, it doesn't fit strictly in the mold of a botanical garden. It draws on the site's unique attributes—the views of the Hudson River, and historic houses—to offer a range of programming to a diverse public. Jennifer MacGregor, Visual Arts Curator, outlined the strategies employed over the past 30 years to exhibit art in this garden context.

In 1977 Wave Hill began organizing annual exhibitions of large-scale, temporary sculpture that used the grounds as a backdrop. With very few opportunities to exhibit outdoors in New York, Wave Hill was at the vanguard of providing opportunities to artists who often exhibited their first significant outdoor works. The shows also attracted an

art world, Manhattan audience, beyond the immediate neighborhood.

The current program, initiated by McGregor in 1999, integrates the exhibitions more closely with Wave Hill's mission, by working with the education department and the garden itself. No longer are the grounds simply a backdrop, but instead a source of connection for the artists who often create new work for the site. Rather than simply offering a selection of contemporary artworks, these exhibits are organized around broad themes that engage the public in a dialogue with nature, culture, and site by building on Wave Hill's distinct context to provide a frame of reference for visiting the garden and the woodlands.

Integrating the visual arts into a non-art institution requires significant leadership, support, and vision. Today, it is an enticing possibility, particularly with so many artists pursuing ideas that relate to science and the humanities, who are eager to work outside of the studio, and engage issues and questions posed by science, history and children's museums. ☀

"A work of art can also be evocative. It can make us see the world in a way that we have never seen it before."



As an artist in residence at Wave Hill, Lisa Murch worked for months to combine invasive plants with everyday crafts materials.



BYOD: Guest Provided Devices in the Museum Experience

by Wayne Labar, Denise Bressler, David Asheim, Peter Samis and Stephanie Pau

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Introduction and Context by Wayne Labar

“These devices will help people coordinate actions with others around the world— and, perhaps more importantly with people nearby. Groups of people using these tools will gain new form of social power, new ways to organize their interactions and exchanges just in time and just in space.”

Howard Rheingold – Smart Mobs , 2002

With these words, Howard Rheingold sets the stage for a powerful opportunity that we, as museums and experience creators, can use to engage our guests further. Increasingly, people visiting our exhibitions and programs come with

sophisticated communication devices—cellular telephones and MP3 players. These devices put to shame the early computers we placed on the exhibition floor—and may in fact still find in some dusty and remote galleries! How we might utilize these portable devices, the opportunities and vistas they open and the challenges they create are just now being explored.

Cell Phones – the Swiss Army knife of our technosociety

The cell phone manufacturer Nokia announced at the 2005 European Network of Science Centres and Museums (ECSITE) Conference in Helsinki that it expected there would be over two billion cell phone users worldwide this year. In the United States users are increasingly looking to their phones as more than just verbal communication devices. The Pew Research Center and Pew Internet & American Life Project, the Associated Press and AOL, LLC released a study this year supporting to this fact.

The communications Swiss Army knife		
	Percentage of cell owners using this feature now on their mobile phones	Don't use it now, but would like to have it
Send and receive text messages	35%	13%
Take still pictures	28%	19%
Play games	22%	12%
Access the internet	14%	16%
Send / receive email	8%	24%
Perform internet searches for movie listings, weather, and stock quotes	7%	24%
Trade instant messages	7%	11%
Play Music	6%	19%
Record their own video clips	6%	17%
Get mobile maps	4%	47%
Watch video or TV programs	2%	14%

Figure 1. Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project, Associated Press, AOL cell phone survey, March 8-28, 2006. N=1,503(752 contacted on landlines and 751 contacted on their cell phones), in all, 1,286 cell users are in the sample. The margin of error for the cell-using population is ± 3%.

Looking at Figure 1, it is clear that the American public enjoys using their phones in many ways and is looking to do even more with their phones in the future. Searching and using the Internet, taking photos, instant messaging (IM), getting maps, playing games and rest assured, other activities in the future, point to a device that can be used in many ways—a “Swiss Army knife” device.

Certainly, this opens a myriad of possibilities with which to engage our visitors. By the very nature of these devices, it means we could interact with guests in real time and interactively, if we so desire. Secondly, there is the opportunity to engage people after a visit, or even before they arrive at the museum. Content and interactivity could be “on call” at all times. The prevalence of mobile devices in society also offers a cheaper approach to assistive or enhanced interpretation for museums, due to the likelihood that they will require a simpler technological infrastructure.

MP3 players

These devices are also becoming ubiquitous in our society (and we have already seen phones that have been designed with MP3 functionality). Recent studies from the business sector point out the following information:

- a year ago in April 2005, 22 million Americans had MP3 players.
- 50 million iPods have been sold since the product launch.
- iPods account for 78% of the MP3 player market.
- iTunes holds 87% of the download market.

Clearly, the world is now filled with significant storage and playback devices that can increasingly display images and video, in addition to audio-only content. These handhelds also give guests the ability to encounter content both before and after visiting the museum. In addition, they also offer opportunities for museums to reduce the amount of technology infrastructure in which they must invest.

Challenges

As with any new technology, there are questions about these devices that need to be answered. Here are a few examples:

- How will they change the nature of the public space of the museum? Do we open ourselves to loud talking and incessant ring tones?
- Do these technologies promote solitary visits vs. the social context within which museums have been very successful?
- What about the issue of guests using their “minutes” in addition to other inherent costs being pushed on them (i.e., gift store purchases and meals)?
- Finally, are there socio-economic, gender or age differences that may make some of our content or interpretation unavailable to all? How do we make it accessible?

Certainly, the only way we will learn the answers to these questions is to experiment and begin using these devices in different ways. Only then will we actually move our field forward and work with the forces and technology shaping our society. What follows are three experiments underway that do just that.

“We realize that mobile learners will be partial to certain activities based on how they use their personal phones...”

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Science Now, Science Everywhere (SNSE) at Liberty Science Center, Jersey City, NJ *by Denise Bressler*

What Is SNSE?

At Liberty Science Center, we believe the growth of mobile phones in the public domain provides the potential to expand the museum learning experience into a new dimension. Mobile devices offer an entirely new way of interacting which, in turn, can transform learning. This is called mobile learning, or m-learning. The SNSE project will build on the research of handheld use in museums and give m-learning the foundation it needs to grow.

No longer will our science center offer only hands-on experiences, but it will allow visitors to engage with exhibits in a totally new way by permitting them to interact with exhibits, retrieve extra content and extend the learning

experience – all from their mobile phones. Therefore, visitors can use their phones as tools for learning not only inside the museum but also outside the museum after their visit. Anyone with a mobile phone can utilize this learning companion which is called *Science Now, Science Everywhere* (SNSE).

SNSE Project: Phase One, 2005 – 2006

The SNSE project has been in existence for over a year and a half. During the initial part of the project, we intended to design applications that would enable visitors to use their mobile phones, PDAs, and MP3 players. However, after our initial advisor meeting in February 2005 and the advisor interviews that were conducted during the front end evaluation, we decided to focus our attention solely on mobile phones. Our advisors said that the consumer PDA market was diminishing because PDA functionality is being absorbed by smartphones, phones that have the functionality of both a PDA and a mobile phone. MP3 players, while somewhat popular among our guests, just didn't have the capabilities for easy, instantaneous download of content from within the museum—a feature that was important to us.

In June of 2005, a preview prototype of SNSE was installed and available to the public through September [see Figure 2]. It included an audio tour and a PDA guide. Both features were available in two small exhibition areas. The audio tour was created using our own phone system (201.200.0201). The PDA guide was created using HTML and pushed to visitors' PocketPCs and Palm OS devices using a Wideray Jack. (<http://www.wideray.com>)



Figure 2, SNSE Overview Panels in Liberty Science Center, June 2005

By November 2005, the original audio tour was expanded and installed at the new *Eat and Be Eaten* exhibition at the Center's temporary facility called Liberty Science Center: Riverside [see Figure 3].



Figure 3. Dad helping his daughter to listen to SNSE during opening weekend of *Eat and Be Eaten*, Nov 2005

By June 2006, the PDA guide evolved into a mobile Web guide. Smartphone users can access online content through the mobile Web that has been customized for the small screen. We are also experimenting with allowing visitors to leave their own comments about the exhibition animals simply by calling in from their mobile phone.

SNSE Project: Phase Two, 2006 – 2009

If we receive funding from the National Science Foundation, this SNSE project will really take off. Available to anyone who has a mobile phone, the SNSE Learning Companion will deepen the visitors' learning experiences in the *Eat and Be Eaten*, *Communication*, and *Breakthroughs* exhibitions scheduled to open in July 2007 at the newly renovated Liberty Science Center. In *Eat and Be Eaten*, visitors will examine the appearance, behavior and physiology of over 20 different species; while in *Communication*, visitors will explore the cultural and technical sides of daily communication; and finally in *Breakthroughs*, visitors will learn about the social and ethical issues posed by new discoveries.

We realize that mobile learners will be partial to certain activities based on how they use their personal phones; therefore, all SNSE experiences will be offered in more than one exhibition area. SNSE will be available using audio, Short Message Service

(SMS) and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) activities. As part of the grant-funded work, we also intend to do extensive research, data collection and distribution. Additionally, we'd like to continue to improve our SNSE offerings and teach other museums how to set up similar systems.

SNSE: Setting the Stage for the Future

Help audience understand own technology

In recent years, museums have started to embrace handheld technologies—often renting devices with pre-installed information for visitors to use while onsite (Intel Museum, Getty Institute) or implementing pilot programs for research purposes (Multimedia Tour Program at Tate Modern, Renwick Handheld Education Project, Exploratorium Electronic Guidebook). The documented research from projects like these confirms that guests enjoy the interactive handheld experience because of the variety of content and the ability to control the experience—it's more of an active learning process. LSC intends to engage visitors in a similar way but through their own mobile phone. Thanks to advances in processor and memory chips, mobile phones are not just for talking anymore; they are complete multimedia centers combining the capabilities of a still and video camera, personal organizer and Web browser all into one device (Marriott, 2005; Stone, 2004). Many visitors already come into our science center with a phone. Why not

Several sections of Denise Bressler's article were excerpted from:

Bressler D., "Mobile Phones: A New Way To Engage Teenagers In Informal Science Learning, in J Trant and D. Bearman" (eds.), *Museums and the Web 2006: Proceedings*, Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics, Published March 1, 2006 at <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2006/papers/bressler/bressler.html>

Additional References:

Marriott, Michel, "Use This Phone to Find a Date. Or See Videos, Or Even Talk," *New York Times*, July 4, 2005

Stone, Brad, "Your Next Computer," *Newsweek*, June 7, 2004, pp.50-54

For More Information:

Project Site, <http://snse.lsc.org>
PDA Guide, <http://mysnse.lsc.org>

(continued from page 27)

provide a learning activity that enables the visitors to learn science content and increase their own technical knowledge of their phone?

Extend the museum visit

The project aims to explore the unique learning opportunities that are possible when visitors use their mobile phones as tools for learning in a science center environment. Specifically, we believe that by using their phones, visitors will have more ownership over their learning experiences, as well as access to the content after their visit. This will allow for a deeper, more extended, learning experience that goes beyond the walls of our science center.

Attract the teenage audience

Science centers have always yearned to connect with teenagers. Young people are embracing mobile technology and building a new culture of interaction around mobile phones. To them, the mobile phone is not a device for making phone calls, but rather, a “lifeline” to the social network and an instrument for coordinating their everyday life. We believe that mobile learning opportunities that are catered to teenagers will connect them to our science center more strongly than ever before.

Bring Your Own Device— Your Cell Phone by David Asheim

Museums have long recognized the importance of providing audio as a valuable interpretative tool for their visitors. Challenges inherent in current solutions, i.e. handheld devices provided by the museum, have limited the use and therefore the power of audio guides.

Cell phones are becoming increasingly popular as an alternative device and tool for the museum and the museum visitor to gain an audio experience. Guide by Cell is one corporation providing this technology on a 100% hosted basis to museums throughout the country.

In November 2005 Guide by Cell partnered with The San Jose Museum of Art to pilot the use of cell phones as an audio delivery device in this museum. The pilot ran for 100 days, ending in March 2006. The purpose of the pilot was twofold:

- Visitor experience: Will visitors embrace this technology and will it deliver a satisfactory experience?
- Museum experience: Is a hosted cell phone delivery service a viable alternative; and, what issues will arise with the use of cell phones in the art galleries?

San Jose Museum of Art Background

This museum sees over 190,000 visitors a year, and is located in downtown San Jose, CA, which is also the heart of Silicon Valley in the San Francisco Bay Area. Both permanent and changing exhibitions comprise the art displayed in this popular destination. No audio tours were in use prior to this pilot.

The exhibition, *Visual Politics: The Art of Engagement* was chosen as the recipient of the cell phone audio tour pilot. Thirteen paintings were included in the tour, along with a welcome greeting from Dan Keegan, the Oshman Executive Director.

Specific Details of the Tour

Guide by Cell established a call-in phone

“Increasingly, people visiting our exhibitions and programs come with sophisticated communication devices—cellular telephones and MP3 players.”

number for museum visitors, and also established a password-protected phone number to allow the museum to call in and record prompts over the phone. The museum was also provided with a password-protected web access where audio files could be uploaded into the tour, and real-time statistics could be viewed by the museum administration. Guide by Cell also provided marketing templates to make the task of creating a “buzz” easier.

San Jose Museum of Art wrote the script for the tour and decided who should record the audio prompts. They then called in to record the tour and also recorded some prompts on a digital hand held recorder, and then uploaded these files. The museum printed postcards to distribute to visitors and printed small identifier signs for the wall. A brief feedback survey was printed and made available at the conclusion of the tour.

All content either recorded over the phone or recorded digitally was turned into a podcast, which was made available via the museum’s web site. The museum also trained the guards/visitor service personnel on how the system worked (in order to answer visitor questions if they arose), as well as a refresher on how to handle issues surrounding cell phone conversations in the galleries. The tour was free to the visitors.

Results

There were three methods of gathering feedback from the visitors—visitors completed one page surveys; they were interviewed by staff members; and, Guide by Cell provided web access to real-time statistics showing exactly how many calls were made by visitors, how many unique visitors called in, average

length of time per visitor, etc.

Highlights included:

- 1,700 calls were made in a 100 day period.
- 3,100 prompts were heard.
- 63 hours of audio were heard.
- 14% of calls were made when the museum was closed (the museum posted the phone number on its web site and promoted visitors to call in to hear sample prompts).

Visitor comments included:

- 26% said prompts were too long (4-5 minutes).
- 13% wanted more audio prompts.
- No issue using minutes (they either had plenty of minutes, or they had free evening/weekend minutes).
- Very easy to use.
- Liked not having to check-out a device and carry it through their visit.

San Jose Museum of Art also received considerable press, including a front-page story in the San Jose Mercury News, and a mention in an AP syndicated article that appeared in USA Today.com and many other publications.

Pilot Conclusions

- Visitors liked using their own device
- The museum found it simple and quick to add or change prompts
- Visitor service staff found that there were no disruptive cell phone conversations or annoying speaker phones used

The museum has now created a new tour where it has added a Spanish language tour alongside its English-speaking tour.

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Future of technology

Museums are looking for even more features, such as feedback (visitors can now leave their own voice comments), voting and surveys, continuation of the visitor experience to the visitor's home by allowing them to access the audio files they heard during their visit, as well as providing images and video on cell phones. Cell phone costs will continue to decrease, cell phone ownership (particularly by the older audience) also continues to increase, and cell phone sound quality improves.

Also, any audio files recorded over the phone or digitally will become commonly offered in the form of podcasts available for download off the museum web site and through online sites such as iTunes. These trends will further solidify the place of cell phones in museums as audio delivery devices.

'Artcasting' at SFMOMA: First-Year lessons, Future Challenges for Museum Podcasters' by Peter Samis and Stephanie Pau

A hybrid of the terms iPod and broadcasting, podcasting has been touted as a revolutionary mechanism for distributing content directly

from provider to client—specifically, for serving audio, video, and other media files directly from a podcast creator's Web site or blog to a subscriber's mobile device or personal computer. As new files become available, listeners are notified automatically; depending on their preferences, subscribers can opt to have the new content transferred directly to their computers or mobile devices or to download files selectively at their leisure.

The Internet's own form of "pirate radio," podcasts have proliferated organically and broken from the polished conventions of mainstream radio, leveling the playing field between "outsider" and "sanctioned" content providers. Inexpensive software and freeware such as GarageBand, Propaganda, and Audacity have simplified the editing process, enabling people with limited resources to post their own podcast "shows." Today a diverse community of podcasters flourishes on the Web, still bound by a tacit understanding that content should be shared freely—in both the democratic and monetary sense. A new genre of programming has been born.

Podcasting at SFMOMA: Learning Our Lessons, Finding Our Form

The SFMOMA Interactive Educational Technologies team began exploring podcasts in the summer of 2005. We started slowly, with our first podcast comprising a curatorial exhibition tour that parroted the classic audio guide format (*September: The Art of Richard Tuttle*). Our next podcast was a more generalized tour that enhanced the visitor experience with audio recordings of an artist's

writings (*October: Robert Adams: Turning Back, A Photographic Journal of Re-exploration*).

While the Tuttle and Adams tours had served as valuable testbeds, we were aware that a linear curatorial tour—in effect, a low-budget audio guide—fell into the trap of mapping an old medium to a new one. It failed to make the most of podcasting's potential as a new medium. What would be its particular, salient characteristics that could help us to build new relationships between the Museum and its public? Collaborating with Bay Area-based Antenna Audio, we next developed an audio “zine,” that contained multiple short features and one longer exhibition tour. Before embarking on the first podcast in the SFMOMA Artcast series, we defined a set of characteristics particular to the medium. Each of these became an aspect of our emerging podcast model.

1) An informal, spontaneous tone, corresponding to a generation of “digital natives” and their casual relationship with technology (Prensky 2001, 2005). The twenty to thirty exhibitions and thousands of artworks presented in the Museum's galleries each year offer a constantly changing, multi-threaded parade of objects, perceptions, and ideas. The general public only hears about a handful of headliner exhibitions, but the informality and flexibility of podcasts allows us to bring to the fore more of the fascinating and provocative ideas at play in the Museum at any given moment.

2) Encouraging dialogue and the inclusion of multiple voices: The portability of the microphone is a powerful way to convene a creative community. The Artcasts' *Vox Pop* feature opens the door to myriad public voices

that offer unrehearsed, casual observations. The “Guest Takes” feature allows us to invite guest artists—such as performer and composer Joan Jeanrenaud, sound artist Pamela Z, and writer JT LeRoy—to share their creative responses to specific artworks, exhibitions, or the museum experience. Finally, our Artcast Invitational gives the general public the opportunity to submit carefully composed, standalone contributions.

3) A rapid response, zine format that blends structure and flexibility: Like a magazine editor, we assemble cultural features that point at the Museum as an ever-changing resource and destination. Some features are of-the-moment, while others can be drawn from relevant resources in our content archive.

4) A movement from the Museum out into the community, and from the community back into the Museum: The portable nature of iPods and other MP3 players makes them equally suited to inject art into the everyday lives of listeners and to bring listeners back into the Museum, where they can listen to audio commentaries in the presence of the artworks that inspired them.

SFMOMA agreed to provide archival interview clips with artists about works on display,” new interviews with artists about current exhibitions, and a “bonus track” exhibition tour for each podcast. Antenna, meanwhile, agreed to record the host narration and *Vox Pop* and to do the final editing and sound design of the zine portion of each Artcast. The result, loosely modeled as a National Public Radio-style audio zine, brings listeners the voices of “people who have something interesting and insightful to say about the art that's on view here at the Museum.”

This article has been abridged from a paper first presented at Museums & the Web 2006. The full text is available online at <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2006/papers/samis/samis.html>.

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Tips if you are considering turning a curatorial walk-through into a podcast: ask the speaker to name the objects s/he is discussing and to orient the listener to the objects' locations in the gallery. For best results, consider transcribing the initial gallery walk-through, editing the script for clarity, and asking the speaker to re-record it under optimal sound conditions.

Podcast Panacea? Five Myths about Podcasting

1. Visitors will be able to bring in their iPods and synchronize them to a docking station in the Museum lobby, then use their own hardware for an audio tour.

Several museums have tried docking stations, but none has come away smiling. Apple itself discourages the use of docking stations. The main problem is that iPods are embedded with preferences that relate to visitors' personal computers, and they are often set up to autofill, or automatically download content, on docking. So, when a visitor docks an iPod with a different computer, the computer initiates a series of dialogue boxes that could, if answered incorrectly, erase the visitor's entire stored music library. In the words of Brent Gustafson, writing on the Walker Art Center's blog:

"... [W]hen you connect an iPod to a rogue machine, [the machine] gives you an alert saying as much and asks if you want to delete the contents of the iPod and marry the iPod to the new machine. That's not exactly a great idea, especially for a user who's on a trip from out-of-town and brought their iPod for things other than museum audio tours" (Gustafson, 2005).

The common solution—for museums that elect to go the extra mile—is to lend out iPods preloaded with tour content (in exchange for a credit card, driver's license, or some form of collateral) to people who have not downloaded the content in advance (Moss, 2006; Maynard, 2006).

2. Podcasts behave the same way as audio tours and can supplant them at a fraction of the cost.

Podcasts are a new format and require a new way of thinking about audio tours—it's best not to use podcasts as object-specific guides. Unlike keypad-based tours, iPods require familiarity with the clickwheel at their center. For visitors who have never used an iPod—and there are millions of such elders in the museum-going population—the clickwheel can be utterly mystifying. What do you click? How do you adjust the volume? What happens if you inadvertently press the back arrow or, worse yet, hit the Menu button and leap out of the playlist altogether? Such uncertainties can leave a visitor feeling hopelessly lost (Moss, 2006).

3. Since iPods play MP3 files, they are compatible with each other and all MP3 players, regardless of the generation.

One drawback of relying on the user's own hardware is the potential for incongruity between players. Even within a single hardware type, such as the iPod, there exist multiple generations. Some older models may or may not be compatible with M4As, the standard for enhanced podcasts that include images and chapters. And Apple's GarageBand 3.0, its purpose-built authoring tool for enhanced podcasts, outputs .ACC files that non-iPod MP3 players and Windows computers might not recognize. A fortiori, vodcasts, or video podcasts—the next new thing—use a variant of QuickTime with a compression scheme and aspect ratio that is unlike anything found elsewhere on either Mac or PC. At SFMOMA, we have published both MP3 (audio only) and M4A (enhanced) podcasts, but we have stopped short of offering video versions until the installed user base is larger.

4. *We no longer need to hire an audio tour production company because podcasts lower the bar so much that we can produce our own.* This is not entirely a myth: a museum can theoretically produce an iPod-based tour with in-house expertise and offer it over the Web or in the museum lobby. But the caveats mentioned in No's. 2 and 3 above apply: the Museum must supply the hardware or risk catering only to those who have predownloaded and brought their own players, and, more important, the iPod clickwheel interface is both too sophisticated and not sophisticated enough to serve as an ideal object-by-object audio tour delivery system (see also "Loss of the Graphical Interface" below). At SFMOMA, we have come to the conclusion that podcasts are better treated as portable zines and facilitators of interarts dialogue than as audio tour replacements. When we do append exhibition tours to our Artcasts, they are typically general overviews for exhibitions that otherwise would have no audio enrichment. We increasingly avoid an object-by-object approach because of the problematic navigation, and we are quite conscious of the discrepancy in production values between our home-grown content and that produced by a professional firm.

Concluding Thoughts

Where will content live in a hardware-agnostic world? What will it sound like? With the popularity of podcasting and the proliferation of low cost or freeware tools like GarageBand and Audacity, how will companies like Antenna Audio and Acoustiguide adjust their profit models? What happens to these companies when the hardware infrastructure belongs

to the audience and they no longer have the hardware rental profits as a source of income? How do their profit models change? One new start-up that specializes in cell phone-based audio tours envisions selling phone cards with scratch-off number codes that enable museum visitors to license access to voice mailboxes about museum exhibitions on a per-visit basis; this development raises a question about what content will sound like in 2008. Will the self-authored cell phone- and iPod-based audio tours that seem poised to threaten the tour companies sound like a throwback to the 1960s? Will the Antennas and Acoustiguides of the world shift their focus to supplying production quality to many different museums rather than providing production and proprietary hardware rentals to the lucky few who provided the bulk of the audio-tour audience in the pre-podcast world? In fact, the days of dependency on specific hardware seem to be coming to an end. In the words of Scott Sayre: "You don't design for a platform. You design for interchange between platforms" (Sayre, 2006).

At SFMOMA, we use podcasts to open up a space for multiple voices: artists, curators, special guests, and audience members. Traditional audio tours theoretically offer this, too, but they tend to exclude the visitor's nonarchival, noncuratorial voice. Podcasts foster a two-way communication between museum and community: iPods are a vector for injecting art ideas into the daily lives of people at home or on-the-go. The opposite is also true: iPods are a way of bringing voices from the community into the Museum. ☀

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Traveling Exhibitions: Nuts and Bolts

by Michelle Torres-Carmona and
Whitney Owens

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The first newsletter from the Traveling Exhibition Professional Interest Committee was issued in the summer of 1984, following the AAM annual meeting in Seattle. Back then it listed sixty-seven members, representing museums, traveling exhibition services and consultants. Since then, numerous museums big and small have entered the arena of traveling exhibitions.

Traveling exhibitions provide an opportunity to explore and learn about the history and culture of a community or an international world. They explore the world of science or soar through the solar universe; display the works of Masters or the objects of civilizations of long ago.

Many museums enter into the field of traveling exhibitions with high expectations, particularly regarding revenue. While increasing the coffers is possible, potential ticket sales should never be the deciding factor.

At the 2006 AAM annual meeting in Boston, four professionals described some of the basic nuts and bolts of organizing, marketing and administering traveling exhibition programs. This article presents some of these basic tools to keep in mind as you consider developing a traveling exhibitions program.

Developing Traveling Exhibitions: Where to Start? by Michelle Torres-Carmona

Developing a traveling exhibition involves many players, often including a curator, conservator, registrar, exhibition designer and fabricator, to name a few. From conceptualization to opening venue, it can take two years or longer;

it's been done faster, but a shorter schedule can prove challenging for those wishing to retain their sanity.

It's important to identify a subject that has a universal appeal, even when traveling an exhibition within one state. Think broadly: while a visitor might not know that Ross "Satchel" Davis pitched for the Negro Leagues, most people know baseball. Next, choose a format for your subject: free-standing panels, media, interactives, objects or artworks. The format you choose will affect the design of the components: free-standing Sintra panels, for example, or cases and vitrines for objects.

Once you have decided to travel an exhibition, you must develop a tour budget. Some basic expenses include curatorial or conservation services; design and fabrication; and exhibition furnishings, including panels, labels, cases, matting/framing and crating. Don't forget the costs involved with image rights, display permissions, and object loan fees. You may also need to include costs for hosting a special opening event for tour venues, including catering, entertaining, invitations, and postage. Tour budgets should include monies for advertising and press materials, including design and printing of marketing packets, as well as costs for administrative travel to openings. Your staff may also need to travel to host venues for installation, de-installation, conservation, and maintenance.

The budget should also include exhibition shipping and storage, including shipping costs to the first exhibitor, costs to store the exhibition during the tour, and costs for shipping loaned objects to and from their lending organizations.

The type of exhibition (objects vs. panels), length of tour, the number of venues and exhibition fee will all factor into the net income. To set an exhibition fee, organizers can review comparable exhibitions in the marketplace. Fees should reflect the marketability, size, and scope of the exhibition, and should at least cover all costs to produce and tour the exhibition.

Finally, be sure to include costs for maintenance during the tour and additional costs to repair exhibition components that may be accidentally damaged. Always remember to include a contingency fund, because Murphy's Law sometimes prevails.

Was That in the Contract?

When something happens to your traveling exhibition—and something will happen—that's not a question you want to ask. Even after you've designed the most travel-worthy exhibition, there are many factors, sometimes beyond your control, that impact the contractual agreement you have signed with the borrower (host museum).

A contract needs to address a multiplicity of items, such as the basic contents of the exhibition, tour schedule, fees and payments, and shipping and handling. Since Hurricane Katrina, many traveling exhibition services are reviewing their clauses regarding natural disasters, requiring a disaster emergency plan in addition to the AAM Standard Facility Report.

Even if an exhibition travels for only two years, the repeated installation and de-installation causes a lot of wear and tear; combine this with untrained or unsupervised

staff, and improper handling and packing, or major damage can occur. The security and environmental requirements for the exhibition, as well as shipping, packing, handling and care requirements in the contract, will ensure that the exhibition and its contents are handled properly. By stipulating your requirements as a condition for hosting the exhibition, you make the borrower aware of their responsibilities.

Because tour schedules are set in advance, changes to the tour can have a rippling affect, altering shipping and opening dates, impacting scheduled programs, and increasing your costs. The contract should list any additional fees or penalties that may result from schedule changes requested by the borrower.

If a local or national sponsor underwrites the exhibition, there may be nonexclusive rights and an official credit line that must be used in all printed materials associated with the exhibition; the borrower may also be required to host a reception, special event, or educational program related to the exhibition. Be sure the contract includes any promotional and public relations requirements for the exhibition, since the last thing you want to see is the name of the exhibition, your organization, or your sponsors improperly listed, or, Heaven forbid, misspelled.

Don't forget to include insurance and indemnification clauses, any copyright issues, and any design requirements for supplemental materials such as publications or posters. Finally, the contract should always include a cancellation clause, since the worst sometimes does happen.

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Marketing a Traveling Exhibitions Program by Whitney Owens

Once you have decided to create a traveling exhibition or tour an existing project, you must begin to put together the exhibition tour. Piecing together museums, dates, and locations can seem daunting, but with some strategic thought, creative flair, and general pluck, an organizer can assemble a great tour. Here are a few suggestions:



The Field Museum's **Chocolate** traveling exhibition is suited to museums and science centers with adult and family audiences.
© The Field Museum

Define Your Audience

Before marketing a traveling exhibition, consider which kinds of host venues might be appropriate. Museums, like exhibitions, come in all shapes and sizes:

- **Subject:** Is your exhibition a collection of artworks or interactives? Does it target children or adults? Is it bilingual? Match the subject of your exhibition to museums with particular collections, missions, and visitor expectations.

- **Gallery Requirements:** Do your target venues need to accommodate 20,000 square feet and provide precise climate control for delicate artifacts? Could your exhibition fit into a small or non-traditional space? Seek out museums with spaces that fit your exhibition's needs, and, if possible, emphasize your exhibition's flexibility.
- **Geographic Area:** Is the artist featured in your exhibition from the Midwest? Does your tour sponsor have its headquarters in Charleston? Try the local angle, and ask people connected with your exhibition to introduce you to area museums.
- **Institutional Goals:** Does your institution want to build connections within your regional community or develop an international presence? How far your exhibition goes geographically can depend on how far your museum wants to go strategically.

When defining your audience, keep in mind that tour destinations may have their own specific exhibition requirements. For instance, an exhibition that travels to California needs earthquake mounts; an exhibition targeted to small museums should require minimal staff for set-up. For international travel, consider the potential for additional requirements, such as heat-treated crates that fit on sea containers and a graphics system that can accommodate other languages (to name a few). Planning for a tour before you design the exhibition can avert logistical headaches later.

Develop Marketing Materials

When you're ready to establish a tour for your traveling exhibition, develop marketing materials that describe its contents, look and feel, physical specifications, rental fee, shipping



Helpful and skilled installation staff contribute to a positive impression of you as exhibition organizer, so invest in training and attention to detail to make each venue's hosting experience a good one. Photograph courtesy Museum of Idaho.

arrangements, and available tour dates. Images of exhibition design and contents will help potential clients visualize your project.

Many exhibition organizers also create electronic versions of their materials for quick distribution to museums who have expressed interest. Use your web site to advertise to potential host venues; you can include everything from images to sample floor plans to exhibition press (a few examples: www.fieldmuseum.org/exhibits/traveling_exhibits.htm; www.childrensmuseum.org/traveling_exhibits/index.htm; http://www.corcoran.org/exhibitions/travel_exhibit.htm; and www.sites.si.edu/). All of your marketing materials should support the brand of your traveling exhibitions program and the brand of your institution.

Contact Potential Host Venues

Once you have identified your target audience and developed marketing materials, contact potential host venues. Savvy marketers use a variety of methods for outreach, including phone calls, targeted mailings, e-mailings, visits, conferences, and listing services. Making cold calls can be scary, but it's a terrific way to learn about unfamiliar museums and broaden your circle of contacts. Both AAM and ASTC offer networking events for the traveling exhibitions community. Foreign museums are often linked to government ministries; if you want to market an exhibition internationally, try contacting your local consuls general to see if they can provide you with an introduction to the appropriate museum.

As you begin building your network, keep records of potential clients in a database that will allow you to track your discussions with different organizations. Provide follow-up



Traveling exhibitions Web sites can include everything from images to sample floor plans to exhibition press. © The Field Museum.

information about your traveling exhibition—including attendance and retail statistics, object lists, graphic samples, design renderings, and floor plans—as it becomes available. As the tour fills up, you will review facility reports from potential venues to make sure they meet your exhibition's physical requirements, and when the time arrives, you will negotiate contracts and collect deposits.

Finally, once you have assembled a tour, make sure that you and your team provide excellent customer service to host venues. Thorough supplementary materials helpful and skilled installation staff, and prompt, courteous shipping agents can all contribute to a positive impression of your traveling exhibition program, so invest in training and pay attention to every detail to make each venue's hosting experience a good one. Each customer interaction contributes to a successful presentation, a healthy client relationship, and important future bookings. ✨



Marketing materials should include basic information about your traveling exhibition, including images of exhibition contents and design. © The Field Museum.

K-12 Curators: What Kids Learn by Designing Exhibitions

by Linda D'Acquisto
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Now, more than ever, students need active, experiential learning opportunities both in and outside of the school setting. With increased pressure to meet academic standards and to do well on accountability measures, schools are tempted to sacrifice meaningful learning experiences in favor of a narrow focus on test preparation. Museum educators are feeling the pressure as well, and are increasingly aligning their programs to the state and district academic standards. But must this current age of educational reform represent a narrowing of learning opportunities for students? Or is this the time for both museum and school educators to explore innovative ways to involve students in meaningful learning experiences that are both rigorous and relevant? Programs that involve students in designing and creating community exhibitions are such experiences.

Exhibit development is a comprehensive process that involves students in research, writing, and design, as well as problem-solving, communication, and teamwork, and is therefore a powerful vehicle for engaged student learning. In our 2006 AAM session, we explored the use of exhibit development as an instructional strategy in the school and in the museum and discussed how both approaches offer innovative alternatives to traditional learning.

Kid Curators by Linda D'Acquisto

It is opening night at Bayside Middle School. The school is filled with energy as teachers and students put the finishing touches on their Revolutionary War Museum before opening the doors to the public. Student docents are dressed

as colonial Americans, eager to guide visitors through the fifteen exhibits. They have practiced their tour scripts for a week and guided other middle school students through the museum. Now they are ready to teach their parents and community about the American Revolution.

Community members and parents begin to arrive; their excitement is obvious. They enter the first exhibit, **Colonial Life**, a walk-in cutaway of a colonial home complete with a kitchen table, fireplace, and rope bed. In this immersion exhibit, furnishings and accessories on loan from a local museum are exhibited alongside artifacts created by students. Near artifacts such as a butter churn, quill pen, spinning wheel, and musket, students have placed detailed text cards that explain differences in the communication, schooling, family roles, and daily lives of colonial and modern Americans. The exhibit addresses the focus question "How did colonial life differ from modern life in America?"

Other displays dot the exhibition. **The Forgotten Faces of the War** exhibit answers the question "What role did women play in the Revolution?" In a dramatic video presentation, 5th grade actors tell the stories of Mercy Otis Warren, Molly Pitcher, Betsy Ross, Abigail Adams, and Deborah Sampson. In the **Can You Believe Everything You Read?** exhibit, the well-known Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem **Paul Revere's Ride** is displayed alongside contrasting information from books and pamphlets about Revere's famous midnight ride. Other exhibits answer questions such as "In what way was communication crucial to the Revolution?" and "How does one event influence future events?" and "How did the technology of the times affect the outcomes of the war?" At each exhibit, student docents interact with visitors.¹

Students in a high school Spanish film and literature class create a bilingual exhibition based on the book, **The Motorcycle Diaries**. (Shorewood High School, Shorewood, WI)



Visualize elementary, middle school, and high school classrooms transformed into research workshops, exhibit design studios, and finally into museums. When students create exhibitions as part of the classroom curriculum, school has an entirely different look and feel. I have had the opportunity to work with teachers and principals who have transformed their school curriculum into interesting museum design projects. In the process, they have brought the curriculum to life and motivated student learning.

When I have the opportunity to visit professional museums, I look for exhibitions and exhibits that encourage visitors to interact with content (and with each other) in fresh and meaningful ways. I find myself imagining the challenging work that must precede such an installation—the research, development, design, and construction. It occurs to me that developing successful exhibitions—those that encourage visitors to “make meaning” of the topic—must present a powerful “meaning-making” experience for the developers as well. At these moments I am fully convinced that the exhibit development process presents a powerful catalyst for student learning.

School museums can be about anything as long as they are well-linked to the academic standards for which teachers are responsible. The simplest way to insure this is to transform an existing instructional unit into a school museum project. School museums can be small-scale projects developed by a single classroom of students or they can be larger-scale projects that involve an entire grade level, multiple grade levels, or the entire school. Regardless of the scale of the project, creating a school museum is not a culminating activity for an instructional

unit. Rather, it provides an organizing framework for the curriculum.

Before students engage in school museum process their teachers engage in a planning process that begins with a key question: “*What will students learn as a result of being involved in this project?*” To answer this question, teachers develop a “big idea” for the exhibition using the format suggested by Beverly Serrell²—a single statement with a “subject, action and consequence” that represents what students should remember about the topic long after the exhibition is over. For example, one school’s environment museum had the following big idea: “The decisions of businesses, government, families, and individuals can hurt or help the environment both nearby and far away”. The teacher who wrote this statement reviewed her local academic standards and science text book before developing the single organizing idea that she felt would have a lasting effect on student’s understanding of the topic.

A big idea enhances the power of a curriculum unit for the same reason it enhances the power of an exhibition—it organizes ideas around an important concept. Learning research suggests that superficial coverage of isolated facts is a poor way to help students organize knowledge. (Bransford, et. al)³. Information is more meaningful and useful to learners when it is presented in a context that they have time to explore and understand. The often criticized

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“... is this the time for both museum and school educators to explore innovative ways to involve students in meaningful learning experiences that are both rigorous and relevant?”

“inch deep and mile wide” curriculum practices common in some schools leave little time for students to develop important, organizing ideas. For this reason many K-12 educators are beginning to organize their curriculum around “enduring understandings,” utilizing backwards design frameworks such as “Understanding by Design”. In this curriculum design model, teachers determine the content that is most essential for students to understand and plan assessments and activities to support those understandings.⁴

Similarly, in a school museum project the big idea and supporting focus questions represent important understandings that are used to develop assessments and to organize student work. For example, an instructional unit about local immigration might be transformed into a school museum project where the big idea for the exhibition is, “Immigrants built a new life in an unfamiliar land, enriching the local culture”. Supporting focus questions, such as the following, may eventually become exhibit areas in the student-created museum: *What brought people here from other countries? How has life changed and stayed the same for cultural groups that have immigrated? What are the challenges of immigrating to another country? How have different cultural groups experienced stereotyping or discrimination? How has each cultural group enriched the local culture where they settled?*

Before students can create an effective exhibition they must know something about their topic; therefore student work begins with research. In small teams of three to five members, students explore the answers to research questions about their focus area. Students use a variety of information sources to find answers to these questions, including print material—library books, reference materials,

the textbook, magazines, and so on—as well as the internet. The school museum project provides a great opportunity to go beyond these typical sources of information. Students may interview people in the community who have firsthand experience with the museum topic. When this happens, people can become a valuable source of information for student research. A student exhibit team studying land and sea battles of World War II, saw an article in the newspaper about a local WWII prisoner of war. They invited him to visit their school, drafted interview questions, recorded his interview, and later studied the transcript for information that became part of their exhibition.

Students include objects, images, and artifacts in their final displays, but these items can also be viewed as resources in research phase of the school museum project. For example, elementary students creating a “History of Our School” museum, found mathematics texts from 1909 in their school storehouse and were able to study these texts, comparing them to their current textbooks.

When a sufficient amount of research has been conducted, student teams teach each other about their findings. This allows students to pull information together and to develop a better understanding of the big idea of the full exhibition. It is at this point—when students know enough about their topic—that they are ready to brainstorm display ideas that will engage their visitors.

When possible, a focused museum visit is incorporated into the process. Where better to learn about good display techniques than at a professional museum? Students examine exhibits and try to define what makes them effective or ineffective. As they explain ways

“...the school museum project asks students to put their knowledge to use by creating a product—a visual and written representation of what they have learned.”

in which exhibits effectively engage, inform, or arouse curiosity among visitors, they begin to develop a better understanding of the characteristics of a high-quality exhibition—information they can use in their own designs. With good models of professional exhibitions and their own criteria in mind, students ask themselves.....

- What ideas are most *important* for our visitors to know, feel, or act upon?
- What is the *story* we want our exhibition to tell?
- How can this story be told *visually*, using objects, images, experiences?

Students brainstorm ways their visitors might “make meaning” of the content for themselves. This is a real challenge, and one way in which school museum process results in much more than a series of written reports affixed to a wall. Students develop exhibit designs, write label copy for their exhibits, and finally construct their displays.

It is my belief that the development, design, and interpretation of an exhibition provides a “complete” learning experience for students. Often school work requires students to *acquire* new knowledge but does not provide opportunities to *use* that knowledge in a meaningful context. In contrast, the school museum project asks students to put their knowledge to use by creating a product—a visual and written representation of what they have learned. Finally, the opening event presents additional opportunities for student learning. As students interact with their visitors by posing and answering questions, leading discussions, guiding tours, or presenting activities to further interpret their exhibition, they *communicate* their knowledge to a real audience. This “complete” learning experience makes the work of students and teachers more engaging

in the classroom because it infuses the learning process with purpose from the very beginning—students must create an interesting exhibition that will educate their community.

Teen Chicago **by Marie Scatena**

Teen Chicago was envisioned as a national model whose strategies for attracting and increasing youth audiences, and inspiring collection and interpretation strategies about the history of adolescence could be adapted by urban museums. Original oral history research carried out by teens hired and trained to do this work was a critical component of *Teen Chicago*. These stories provided the foundation for an exhibition, website, and publications about growing up in Chicago over the twentieth century. The fifteen teenagers who comprised the Teen Council worked as paid staff at the museum for two years, collecting one hundred oral histories, advising on all aspects of the exhibition, from label writing to curating, advising on content and design, developing a website, and developing and implementing programs. This fundamental involvement was essential from the start in order to achieve the goal of building a new audience. It also raised questions about the challenges of working with teenagers on museum exhibition projects. How did the selection of teens and training relate to and inform the exhibition development process? Why was it important for teens to tell, collect, interpret, and display stories about growing up?

Teen Chicago offered unique opportunities to establish a teen community within the museum. Forming a Teen Council who would represent as many perspectives as possible, was critical to the project's success. Selection of the Teen Council entailed a process which considered

To see photo stories of school museum projects visit www.kidcurators.com. For more information about the school museum planning and instructional processes see: D'Acquisto, L. (2006) *Learning on Display: Student-Created Museums that Build Understanding*, Alexandria, VA, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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“So, exploring how different generations of teens lived in the city became a critical objective.”

criteria such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic, and academic achievement levels and geographic backgrounds, skills, talents, interests, and individual personalities. In creating a diverse Teen Council, the exhibition team had a ready-made array of teen ideas, opinions, and perspectives to draw upon. For the teens, this created many opportunities for expressing their individuality. The Teen Council's diversity both reflected the demographics of the city, and in turn the pool of interviewees. Another opportunity critical to the Teen Council's and audience building success was to give teens adequate time and space to meet, socialize, and work together. Working in two adjacent classrooms turned office spaces, Teen Council members were able to re-imagine themselves as museum professionals and historians, researching and interpreting the past for public audiences. The opportunity to learn new skills such as interviewing, preservation, and interpretation of objects, and apply these skills, and along with opportunities to work side by side with adults, was cited by most Teen Council members as the most important benefits of working on the project.

The Teen Council was trained in Chicago history, oral history, and programming, in an eight week course designed as a museum studies and outward and inward bound history course. The course curriculum included time spent learning about the city, both out in it and in the museum, studying with a cast of experts, and learning historical practice, with an emphasis on oral history. Daily journal writing gave the Teen Council time to process and reflect on what they had learned. From their first day at the museum, the teens were aware, the oral histories they were collecting would be important for the museum and for the field.

Teenage history is relatively undocumented and the *Teen Chicago* oral history collection would fill a gap in the historical records at the Chicago History Museum, and provide the basis for a ground-breaking exhibition. Throughout the project, our lead scholar, historian of adolescence Harvey Graff, supported privileging a teen voice in the exhibition by setting the conceptual framework and guiding the oral history survey and exhibition which looked at the main spheres influencing teen life: home, school, work, and play. He vetted their oral history survey, seconded their object and design choices, reviewed all curatorial work, and even attended programs.

The issue of how to make the exhibition appealing to both youth and a general public audience was one we grappled with throughout the process. Teen Council's lively debating arose from the diversity of perspectives from which the CHS exhibition team could draw upon for advice and coaching. Even with extensive Teen Council involvement, we knew that teen history would not appeal to youth if told in an 'adult' voice. The Teen Council members and their ideas challenged exhibition curator Joy Bivins, "The Teen Council did not develop the interpretation, but they played a role in helping to shape it. It was sometimes difficult for me to swallow what the Teen Council said. They challenged the ways I looked at content and they also forced me to put myself in their shoes, in terms of what subjects seemed stereotypical or stale to them". Considering teen perspectives and coming to consensus was time consuming, but ultimately rewarding for Joy Bivins and designers Dan Oliver and Julie Nauman. Two decisions made jointly by the Teen Council, designers, and curatorial team was that the physical space of the exhibition

“Teen Chicago created a safe and welcoming environment that facilitated historical debate, discussion and creativity across generations, ethnicities, classes and backgrounds.”

should not contain any 90 degree angles. This resulted in curved and sweeping shapes, which created an overall ‘cool’ effect. Another Teen Council suggestion was to not always look for the similarities between generations. Joy Bivins remembered, “During one brainstorming session, teen council members came up with the idea that they (meaning teens) are different and we should concentrate on that. This ran counter to what the adults came up with. So, exploring how different generations of teens lived in the city became a critical objective.” These compromises were negotiated along with the idea of including Teen Point of View labels, complete with Teen Council member photographs and curved shapes. These labels were written by the teens themselves, contrasting and corresponding to labels of quotes taken from the oral history interviews, both sprinkled throughout the exhibition, mimicking the feel of the intergenerational dialog which occurred during interviews.

The most popular exhibition element was the teen bed that dominated the home/private space section of the exhibition, and begged questions about the public’s on-going fascination with teen bedrooms. A summative evaluation cited that over 50% of visitors stopped to view the bed. Accompanied by an interactive touch screen game matching photographs, Teen Council members, and their bedrooms (what else!), the bed also became the floor of the hang-out section, an interactive piece. People added candy wrappers, pens and pencils, a folder, a condom, and a cigarette (later ingeniously removed from between a small opening in the acrylic covering. The floor in the hang-out section was sponsored by Director of Exhibitions, Tamara Biggs, in a successful pairing of programming and exhibition. At the

opening, visitors were invited to draw slang on the floor with markers (closely supervised by museum staff). Over the course of the year the exhibition was on display at the museum, the floor filled up with slang from visitors—on the floor and nowhere else.

The *Teen Chicago* exhibition drew upon the content and spirit of the oral histories, and was embedded in a larger plan to involve teenagers in museums as visitors and as staff. Through the process of becoming oral historians, Teen Council members created an interrelatedness of personal and public history as well as the importance of historical trends, events, and memory in shaping teen lives in Chicago across time. As Teen Council members analyzed and interpreted the data, they observed how people characterized their own teen years across time. Interview questions such as “When did you become a teen?” and “What event or experience defined your transition to adulthood?” highlighted the differences and



Teen Council Coordinator, Ray Yang and Teen Council members, Claire Elderkin and Bakir Bicakcic secure personal objects such as lipstick cases, teen magazines and CD's to a Simpson's inspired bedsheet donated by Teen Councilor Landon Jones.



The Teen Bed featured prominently in the award-winning **Teen Chicago** exhibition was designed by Dan Oliver, along with curator Joy Bivins and fifteen Teen Council members.

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similarities among teens growing up in different times and circumstances and challenged interviewees to reflect on how their identity as teens was constituted. Ultimately, the teen-developed oral history questionnaire helped to shape much of the exhibition's content and oral history video clips were an appealing and significant feature of the exhibition. Curator Joy Bivins considered that, "... the oral testimony gave many of the objects more weight. It can be difficult to make the artifacts of youth "sing" because many of them can be commonplace, meaning many of our visitors either have seen similar materials or have or had them in their possession. The oral histories helped to give them context and a quality of significance they may not have had otherwise". Likewise, these powerful stories influenced programming. Programming and the exhibition were married in a play, based on the oral histories, which was written, staged, directed, choreographed, and performed by students at two opening events. This represented the most thoroughly realized example of how the exhibition and programs related to each other. During the life of the exhibition at the museum, programs with strong music and dance components evolved into themed events. A voter registration drive highlighted student activism described in the

exhibition, and brought over 400 teens to the museum in late summer when most teenagers were relishing the last days of summer before school started.

Teen presence in the form of the Teen Council, as museum visitors and in the exhibition brought subtle and obvious changes to the museum's culture. Teen Council member Hai Minh Nguyen defined their undeniable vitality as, "bringing a lot more energy than the old fogeys" to the museum. As staff, the Teen Council's agenda sought to make the experience as different from high school as possible. Appropriate language, dress and behavior were big issues which required negotiation with staff from many museum departments in order to establish reasonable and happy compromises. In some cases, a war of attrition was waged and won by the Teen Council. They pushed policy boundaries by bringing issues forward about shoes or no shoes in the museum, sitting on the floor, exposed midriffs, noise levels, running, dancing, and going in and out of the building. In some sense, **Teen Chicago** was an experiment in both ownership and storytelling, and in a nine month run at the Harold Washington Library, visitors responded to the exhibition in an enthusiastic, but quieter way.

Mentoring and inter-generational learning were also hallmarks of the project, as well as a remarkably successful outcome of interviewing. In general, teens were awestruck with some of the older interviewees. The immediate relevance to teens hearing about dating in the 1920's, driving cars in the 1940's, and being drafted in the 1960's was apparent in their feedback summaries written after each interview. The teens also had no preconceived notions about the person who was to become the group's

most influential mentor. A diary entry from July, 2002 read, "Today Studs Terkel will be talking to us he is apparently a really famous guy but I had never heard of him before today". Studs Terkel was one of many of **Teen Chicago's** champions. Lonnie Bunch's initiation and direction gave **Teen Chicago** its size and scope, and his support was indispensable to the project's success. The teens themselves garnered the respect of the staff who worked with them and amazed visitors. Project sponsor Phyllis Rabineau observed at a Friday night teen event, "They (visitors) were surprised too see young people not in uniform, not in checkered uniforms, to see young people

looking and acting a little crazy... but they got it that young people were here as a new presence at the museum." **Teen Chicago** created a safe and welcoming environment that facilitated historical debate, discussion and creativity across generations, ethnicities, classes and backgrounds. **Teen Chicago** has been a part of a movement in Chicago to foster respect for youth. It provided the public with fresh ways to consider how, if given opportunities, teenagers might participate in Chicago's cultural, intellectual and artistic life. We hope this project inspires more than replication, but inspires new ways to advocate for, work with, and take delight in youth in museums. ☀

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² Serrell, B. (1996), *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, Walnut Creek, CA, AltaMira Press.

³ Bransford, Brown, Cocking, (1999), *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, National Academy Press, page 30.

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Christi Atkinson, Associate Director of Education and Community Programs, from the Walker Art Museum, was also part of this panel presentation. Information about the Walker Art Center Teen Arts Council (WACTAC), an innovative teen-directed program designed to connect young adults to contemporary art and artists, is available at <http://teens.walkerart.org>.

The Latest in Exhibit Trends (From the Designer's Perspective)

by Douglas Simpson, Christopher Chadbourne, Jeffrey Kennedy, Michael Roper, Sara Smith, Sari Boren, Peter Kuttner and Larry Bell

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Boston is home to an amazing concentration of exhibit design firms. As the role of the exhibit design consultant continues to grow in the museum community, it seemed fitting at the AAM conference in Boston to hear from some of this talent. There's a wide variety represented here—design firms focusing on history exhibits, science centers, children's museums, media, and firms that cross traditional boundaries. And to keep us honest, Larry Bell, a longstanding museum "insider" gives his response.

Dramatic Storytelling and the Institutional Blockbuster **by Christopher Chadbourne**

I'd like to speak about the trend of using dramatic storytelling in blockbuster exhibits. Our firm designed two blockbuster exhibits in the past three years that employed dramatic storytelling as a strategy to help each museum better communicate with its audience and also to significantly boost its attendance. These exhibits are *The Capture of the U-505* at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry and *The Price of Freedom: Americans at War* at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. Each of these exhibits has been enormously successful with visitation of over 2,000,000 per year each and laudatory visitor feedback.

The Capture of the U-505 brings MSI's popular outdoor exhibit into a dramatic 36,000 square foot indoor, underground space. Our goal in redoing this exhibit was to tell the larger story of the capture, relate it to the science of the subject matter, and make it accessible to more people.

The Price of Freedom: Americans at War is a revamping of the Smithsonian's military exhibits, bringing them under one umbrella exhibit. In each area we worked to convey both the individual moment and collective experience. For example, in the area on 9/11 we utilized the iconic photo of the plane crashing into the tower, a piece of the World Trade Towers wreckage and a cell phone from Flight 93 found in that Pennsylvania field.

Here are six principles we adhere to in our work on this type of project

1. *Tell good stories.* Identify your messages. Develop stories to support those messages.
2. *Use artifacts (and/or media) as windows to these stories.*
3. *Invest your visitors in the protagonists' story.* Make the stories relevant to the visitor's life. Use first person narratives. Be aggressively inclusive. Don't segregate groups into their own exhibits, but include everyone throughout the body of the story.
4. *Establish context.* Don't make assumptions about what your visitors know. Our research at MSI showed that only 40% of our audience recognized the Nazi flag. Don't assume prior knowledge, establish it.
5. *Pace the show. Vary the media. Pull the visitor forward.* There are some important throughput issues when designing an exhibit in a quarter mile long exhibit space (the space we inherited for *U-505*). Pulling the visitor forward was critical. Research told us that if we placed our interactives on the science of submarines under the ramp (as we originally designed) as many as 35% of visitors would turn back,

“Pace the show. Vary the media. Pull the visitor forward”

having seen the sub from above. So we moved the interactives out into full view as an attract device to pull the visitors through the entire exhibit experience.

6. *Be collaborative from start to finish.* These two projects were intensely collaborative between the institution and the designer, with good ideas emerging jointly from both sides of the table.

You're Up: Learning as a Two-Way Street by Jeff Kennedy

I found my inspiration outside the museum world—in the *New Yorker* magazine cartoon caption contest, of which I'm a longtime fan. I recently read an interesting comment by cartoon editor Ben Greenman that one of the reasons for the contest was that “we wanted to know how imagination was sparked when someone was looking at an image with an incongruity in it that called for a comic line.” In other words, he felt there is something to be learned from the way their readers think about things. Then there's a new daily two-page spread in the *Boston Globe*: “You're Up, with your pictures, your words, your thoughts...these pages are in Your Hands.” So a trend is in the ether—affording people opportunities to contribute in some personal way to something larger—whether in print, online, or in a museum (my focus here).

Some examples:

- At the Welcome Wing of London's Science Museum, the *Comment* wall, designed by Casson Mann, displays words input by visitors and moves them over an expansive

wall 26 meters high. While this is as much a work of art as a medium of communication, there is nonetheless an interest in the relationship with the visitor being one of dialogue rather than monologue.

- *Memory*, an NSF-funded exhibition created at the Exploratorium under the direction of Kathy McLean in the late 90's, used a low-tech, high touch approach to bringing visitors' words into the exhibition, exemplified by a journaling station where we were invited to recall and write down our *Earliest Memories* and a *Shared Memories* wall where we filled in a timeline of historical events by posting events important in our own lives.
- The recent *Slavery in New York* exhibition at the New-York Historical Society featured an area asking visitors to respond to the exhibit using a self-recording video system called *Telling Lives*, created by the American History Workshop (AHW) in collaboration with Operand. Videos were played within the exhibition and the collection of 6,000 total are now being used as a resource in the development of the next installment of the exhibition, as well as in programs. In the view of Richard Rabinowitz, president of AHW, this opens up a practical means of creating a truly “dialogic museum”—the two-way street suggested in the title of this talk.
- At the new Science Center of Iowa, Jeff Kennedy Associates designed an *Astronomy* gallery in which visitors create their own planetarium mini-shows which they can play immediately or add to a queue to be played on the planetarium's big dome—input beyond just words.



At the Science Center of Iowa, visitors make their own planetarium shows and screen them on the big dome. © Kevin Burke for Jeff Kennedy Associates

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Rather than summarizing, I would like to close with a coda, my favorite *New Yorker* cartoon caption contest winner.



"More important, however is what I learned about myself." Roy Futterman, New York, N.Y.
©The New Yorker

The bottom line: What we learn about ourselves in the course of a museum visit is an extremely important part of the experience. This self-discovery can be facilitated by affording visitors opportunities to be active contributors to the exhibition.

Integrated media expands audiences and fosters dialogue with visitors **by Michael Roper**

Interactive communication technologies continue to transform the way people learn, play, and investigate new areas of knowledge. Education, advertising, entertainment, and work are all being transformed by these technologies. Where in the past, designers were primarily concerned with three-dimensional design, visitors are now looking to explore a subject on their own terms, creating their own custom experiences as they move through an exhibit. Designers are relying increasingly on media and interactivity to build designs that unfold in different ways.

Slavery in New York, designed by KPC for The New-York Historical Society—which ran from October of 2005 through March of 2006—touched a chord in New York. New Yorkers came to learn about this forgotten or submerged history, but just as importantly, they came to discuss this history, to reflect on it, ask questions, and to ponder its relevance to our society today.

The exhibition was authoritative and based on impeccable scholarship. It allowed visitors to see many important documents and artifacts. In this sense, it was a traditional museum exhibition. But *Slavery in New York* provided more than that. Interactive media allowed us to engage visitors from all educational backgrounds, including school children, teenagers, and adults.

A few brief examples:

- In the Great Hall of the Museum, visitors encountered a large sail with moving text—a poem on the Atlantic Slave Trade and its impact on New York. The text swirled down onto the floor, where it flowed onto children and adults as they walked through the hall.
- In Gallery 2, visitors could explore a key historical document in a media kiosk that allowed them to scroll a “magic” lens over the Dutch text, translating it into English.
- In another Gallery, visitors played an interactive game that allowed them to join the Manumission Society and use the laws of the period to free slaves.
- Later in the exhibition, visitors encountered a media-based well. As they looked down into the well, rather than seeing their own reflections, they saw the reflected images of female slaves who came to the well to collect water for their masters and discuss the problems of the day.

All of these pieces provided multiple “entry points” into the exhibition. The media allowed visitors to combine what they were learning from the more traditional exhibition elements—graphics and text—with evocative stories that touched both the heart and the mind.

New communication technologies are putting museums and designers into an equal dialogue with museum visitors. We may know more about the subject area, but we don’t know our audiences’ rich and diverse experiences. It is their responses that can transform an exhibition into something profound and unique.



Visitors encounter media among artifacts in Gallery 3 of **Slavery** in New York. Image courtesy Krent/Paffett/Carney, Inc.

Designing for Relevance **by Sara Smith**

As exhibit design consultants, we are privileged to hear a wide variety of different clients express their desires for their exhibits, their institution, and their visitors. “Relevance” summarizes in one word the requests that we hear the most. Museums want the topics of their exhibits, the experiences that people have, the design of the spaces and the buildings, etc. to be relevant to the lives of all of their visitors. This is not news to anyone in the field. It is actually just good design.

As exhibit designers and developers we use the content, the space, and the design of individual elements to make connections between visitors and the exhibit. Sometimes the most inspirational ideas come from outside of museums. For instance, **The Bean** sculpture in Chicago’s Millennium Park beckons people to engage with it. From afar, it reflects the city in ever-changing ways. Close-up, people see themselves as a part of that city in ways they never have before. It invites strangers to laugh together and families to explore. It allows for contemplation and examination, and for people to feel that they are a part of this city and of a community.

Museums increase their opportunity to connect to visitors if the design of the space takes into



The Bean, Millennium Park, Chicago.
© Sara Smith



Nantucket Historical Society,
©Peter Vanderwarker

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account flexibility and programming. At the Nantucket Historical Association, a space that functions as a gallery, a media show, and an area for docent-led, educational, or after-hours programs engages visitors with the topic of whaling, and provides a sense of pride for local residents, a place where they can see themselves.

A challenge at all history centers is how to make the past relevant to the lives of visitors today. A variety of techniques can help connect the past and the present. We look to develop the content in such a way that visitors have full access to images, oral histories, objects and stories, whether through separate discovery zones or in touch screen databases and audio stations embedded within the exhibits. Opportunities for visitor feedback are also important.

Perhaps the most important thing we keep in mind when designing any exhibit is allowing room for contemplation, for small groups and for individuals. Though space that is not filled with content or activities can sometimes be a hard sell, it is an important part of a museum visit. The quiet and the physical space that allows individuals and groups to think about the exhibit helps visitors create their own connections, create their own relevance.

Designing for Relevance by Sara Smith

A current trend in the children's museum field is designing exhibits for children and families that support visitor-directed play. These exhibits encourage open-ended play that is experience-based, where children are the producers of experiences rather than consumers of a finished product, and which

are less about specific content topics, such as bridges or bumblebees.

Why is this a trend? Play is vital to children's cognitive and social development. Beyond the embedded opportunities for cognitive development, play provides the forum for social and emotional development, such as communicating, understanding cultural rules and social behaviors, and practicing self-direction and self-control.

There is a loss of free, unstructured play in the lives of many children, and museums can provide play experiences that are significantly different from the educational experiences of schools and from many of the structured and media-based play experiences that children have outside the museum.

Wondercabinet Interpretive Design, Inc. developed and designed the ***Play & Imagination gallery*** for the National Children's Museum in Washington, D.C., working with lead design firm Amaze Design. The goal is to let children play with flexible structures and lots of materials. Children are encouraged to use ordinary materials in unexpected ways; fun is available everywhere, not just in a toy box.

The exhibit has several zones for different kinds of play: large scale construction, small scale construction, sensory play, pretend play, social play, individual play, collaborative play, creative expression, problem-solving, etc. Excepting one intimate environment with specific entrances, all the play zones open up broadly into other areas of the gallery, to encourage visitors to freely move among the environments with their materials.



National Constitution Center,
©Eliana Strauss



Artist rendering of National Children's Museum **Play and Imagination** gallery.
©Amaze Design

A small storage room offers visitors a variety of off-the-shelf materials including sheets, Velcro strips, large cardboard boxes, cardboard tubes, toilet plungers, telephone books, fabric strips, and plastic cups. Blocks, dolls, plush animals and toy cars encourage pretend and social play.

The exhibit philosophy extends to the gallery walls, which incorporate ordinary materials in unusual ways and provide opportunities for visitors to participate in the design.

Ultimately, our goal for this exhibit is that the most beautiful, colorful and joyful elements are the ones that the visitors will create.

Museums with a Point of View **by Peter Kuttner, FAIA**

To start a discussion of trends today I was tempted by an article from thirty-seven years ago, printed in *Progressive Architecture* just as I was beginning design school. The trends in 1969 were straightforward:

- Monuments of Architecture vs. Non-buildings with Focus on the Artifacts

- Permanent Displays vs. Traveling Exhibits
- Static Glass Cases vs. Immersive Environments

It would seem those same trends are still working out their issues in 2006. However, today I would add to the list of trends the desire or societal pressure for museums and other public institutions to take a stand on issues, or to at least open themselves up to the discussions at hand.

I would loosely cluster contemporary museums and exhibits taking a stand, or expressing their point of view, into three groups.

1. There are the general institutions, which in the past have stopped short of tough issues. These are the larger museums and science centers attracting large numbers of the general public, that feel the need to avoid the risk associated with controversy.
2. Then there are the museums or exhibits specifically dedicated to a particular point of view.
3. To these two types I would now include *advocacy groups*, only just recently

“What we learn about ourselves in the course of a museum visit is an extremely important part of the experience.”

“Designers are relying increasingly on media and interactivity to build designs that unfold in different ways.”

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discovering the power of immersive encounters and exhibits.

The large institutions, often concerned with alienating visitors or donors, have begun to tackle these tough issues as *moderators*, illustrating multiple sides to an issue and opening the floor for debate. The term of choice today is to offer a “Forum.” Virginia Tech offers their “Choices and Challenges forum,” dealing with cloning, genetic engineering of food, pharmaceuticals, and others. The “Current Science & Technology Center” at Boston’s Museum of Science is also a forum—it provides a clear obvious space for debate, it is fast and flexible to meet changing needs, and it is in the thick of the exhibit floor.



The Current Science & Technology Center at Boston's Museum of Science.
©Cambridge Seven Associates, Inc.

Museums specifically dedicated to make a partisan point often occupy a place of dubious merit in the exhibit world. A search today of top *Google!* hits on museum exhibits gives the honors to the Conspiracy Museum in Dallas (“The Truth may free your mind!”), linking the King, Kennedy, and even Lincoln, assassinations together in a worldwide conspiracy. The Creation Museum has only a web site at the moment, but even its name gives us its position. While some of these one-sided museums seem designed for the lunatic fringe, others are more thoughtful. Last year we recognized the exhibits for the Joseph McCarthy Museum in Appleton, Wisconsin. These museums work if we are clear at the outset there is a position, recognize the differing stances of multiple participants, and leave room for the visitor to make their own decisions.

Now, numerous advocacy groups have begun to create visitor centers as a way to meet their missions. Similar in some respects to the partisan venues, these organizations still work to keep the discussion open. In other ways these organizations are already museums with programs, but no museum. I was quite impressed to visit Audubon’s Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Naples, Florida. Audubon has been a model for many, having seen dramatic numbers of visitors becoming *members* once they visit—the lifeblood of these organizations. Audubon promotes conservation, but they also have their own tough sell, such as making the public understand controlled burns or hunting regulations.

In our work with the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and for Heifer International, we are working with experienced organizations on new museums. Each of these organizations



Sketch of Heifer International's education center.
©Cambridge Seven Associates, Inc.

already has a mission, a Board, a director, and a development arm. However, as we work with these groups we need to be cognizant that this museum part is new, and it is important that the Boards become enthusiastic supporters. In many ways for the Conservancy (and their donors) the "Visitor" is a new concept, different from a member or a contributor, and their previous education work has been in the field, not in a bricks and mortar building.

An Insider Response **by Larry Bell**

A few years ago a bunch of us at the Museum of Science had a workshop to respond to the question, what should an exhibit do if we are doing our job right? We came up with this mnemonic that provides one yardstick to judge the success of an exhibit.

CLEAR

Curiosity

Does the exhibit stimulate curiosity? And in a broader sense, does it provoke an emotional response?

Learning

Does the exhibit create the kinds of non-verbal learning experiences hard to get elsewhere-- experiential, visceral learning?

Empowerment

Do the visitors feel like they can do something

they couldn't do before?

Access

Is the content accessible to lots of different kinds of visitors?

Relevance

Can the visitors relate this content to their lives?

So I used this score card as these exhibit design consultants described various projects. The chrome bean in Chicago's Millennium Park is a great example of provoking curiosity. You want to know what that thing is and go closer to find out. Learning was obviously stimulated in these projects. Visitors creating or contributing something to an exhibit provide wonderful examples of empowerment. Relevance was certainly evident in the *U-505* exhibit. It responds to the question, why does this sub matter? It's a great artifact, but what does it have to do with people? The exhibit clearly answered that question telling all the relevant stories.

I've come up with my own list of (rather cynical) trends.

1. **Guaranteeing** that exhibits will generate huge attendance (which provokes the question, is market research playing too strong a hand in our exhibits?)
2. **Demonstrating** that learning is happening (something one often needs to prove to funders).
3. **Creating exhibits** on an increasingly tight budget.

"Sometimes the most inspirational ideas come from outside of museums."

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Summing Up **by Douglas Simpson**

In reviewing what our six panelists had to say about trends in our field, one thing is clear, we're about creating experiences. Exhibits are clearly no longer speaking in that omniscient voice. The best exhibits don't tell visitors what to think or do, but provide an arena where visitors arrive at their own sense of things, make their own connections, and maybe even learn something about themselves. They are no longer passive recipients of knowledge from the museum's vast storehouse, but actively involved in their own learning. Through high and low tech means visitors are contributing to exhibits—and in a tangible way become the exhibit. A dialogue with the museum begins. The exhibit designer's role becomes at once both more humbling and exhilarating. ✨



Pittsburg Children's Museum.
©Sara Smith

Trying to Reach a Family Audience? Children's Museums Can Help

by Marcia Z. MacRae, Liza Reich Rawson,
Gail Ringel and John Russick

Trying to Reach a Family Audience at the Chicago History Museum by John Russick

For many traditional institutions, making the shift to creating exhibitions and spaces for families can be a perplexing task. In early 2003, as part of the effort to mark the 150th anniversary of its founding, the Chicago History Museum (CHM) began developing a new exhibition for children. The new children's gallery opened on September 30, 2006 along with six other new exhibitions at CHM.

From the outset, the children's gallery project team recognized that the museum's traditional model for developing exhibitions, "content and collections first" might not be the right approach for reaching a family audience. The Project Director, Lynn McRainey, Director of Education at CHM, and I worked together to develop an ambitious plan to seek input, advice, and guidance from other talented museum professionals, skilled educators, and experienced evaluators familiar with family audiences.

We quickly concluded that we had much to learn about communicating with kids and families. We developed a network of children's museum staffers who were willing to let us tap into their vast knowledge and experience, and with their guidance, we set upon a three-part strategy to move the project forward. The first step was to build our own capacity to address the needs of our target audience by steeping ourselves in the literature and research available about family audiences in museums.

The second was to identify the successful tools and techniques being employed in children's museums and seek ways to integrate them into CHM's exhibition development process. The third part of our strategy was to build an internal commitment to reach family audiences at CHM that was largely derived from the model used in children's museums.

Strategy #1: Build our capacity to address the needs of our target audience.

The key advice we took from our children's museum advisors was to identify and learn all we could about our target audience early in the process. Our advisors recommended authors, articles, and data addressing how children and families behave, learn, and use museums. Because the Chicago Public School curriculum features Chicago history beginning in third grade, we identified eight- and nine-year-olds (third- and fourth-graders) as our target audience, and spent a lot of time visiting schools, observing behavior, and talking to teachers and students about our project. Testing classroom activities with students opened our eyes to what third-graders really think about Chicago and history.



CHM Educator, Brendan Kredell leads an activity designed to discover what third-graders think Chicago sounded like in the past.

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Testing the prototype of the Smell Map of Chicago History for the children's exhibition, **Sensing Chicago**, which opened at CHM on September 30, 2006.

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In the summer of 2004, we hired Minda Borun to conduct a series of focus groups with children to obtain some additional reliable data, which has been helpful throughout the exhibit development process.

Our children's museum advisors also encouraged us to try to empathize with our audience and anticipate their needs. We developed a long list of key characteristics of eight- and nine-year-olds. For instance we discovered that they tend to be between 4 feet 2 inches and 5 feet tall and weigh 55 to 80 pounds. They love their own point of view and they like sharing it with others. They are rational and logical thinkers with creative impulses, and they seek mastery of new skills. Having this information handy was continuously useful, from the design choices made about the appropriate height of images or labels and the length of a kid-sized hot dog bun, to the less-obvious decisions about how to incorporate both the information to navigate an activity and the prompt to break from the script and give kids permission to "draw outside the lines."

Strategy #2: Identify the exhibit development tools and techniques used in children's museums and integrate them into our process.

Children's museum exhibit teams talk to their audiences before, during, and after they work on an exhibit. We took this practice to heart. We built relationships with students and teachers, children and families from across the city. We talked with them, listened to them, watched them, and then we did it all over again. They helped us make every decision about the product we were developing and in many cases the process we were using to develop it.

Children's museum exhibit teams establish clear objectives and achievable experience goals for their projects and focus on creating quality experiences with the subject rather than pushing specific content goals. Often, when we would float an early concept for the exhibit by a children's museum developer or designer, they would say, "nice idea, but what will the kids do?" Breaking from our "content and collections first" approach was sometimes harder than we anticipated. Once we established our experience goals, we were encouraged to go back to them regularly to make sure we were on the right track throughout the process.

Children's museum exhibit teams prototype their exhibits. One of the key ways we sought input from our audience was by mocking up our exhibit ideas whenever possible and getting them in front of the target audience. Our prototyping efforts have given us insight into the ways kids are likely to use our activities and revealed the missed opportunities that only a child's mind can divine.

Strategy #3: Building an internal commitment to employing a new approach for exhibit development, at least when children are the target audience.

We recognized that not everyone at CHM was wildly enthusiastic about developing a family-friendly image for the museum. There are people at the museum who feel strongly that if we allow the needs of families to influence all future exhibit content and design choices we risk losing our devoted adult audiences, the traditional core of our membership.

From the beginning we tried to identify key CHM staff who understood both the degree of change required to become a destination

“From the outset, the children’s gallery project team recognized that the museum’s traditional model for developing exhibitions, “content and collections first” might not be the right approach for reaching a family audience.”

for families and the opportunities that this transformation would provide for expanding our audience. To build support and commitment for the project, we identified energetic, likeminded people from across the institution to help us build enthusiasm for the project. We also developed clear and concise documents with well-researched and unassailable data and shared that information with others. Most importantly, we developed an exciting new product—an exhibition conceived, developed, and designed with the input of children. It has captured the imagination of CHM staff and helped the museum fulfill its commitment to family audiences.

***It’s About the Kids:
Using Developmental
Frameworks to Help Create
Family-Friendly Exhibitions
by Liza Reich Rawson***

Reaching family audiences means knowing who they are, why they come, their needs and interests, and their readiness to engage and learn. Many museums employ a number of audience research and assessment tools—literature reviews, three-part exhibition evaluation processes, visitor demographic surveys and, increasingly, family learning studies—in their exhibition planning. A tool less well known outside the children’s museum field is a developmental framework.

Developmental frameworks describe children’s typical physical, social, emotional, and cognitive abilities at different ages. Primarily used by pediatricians, early childhood educators and anxious new parents, these frameworks

provide caregivers with benchmarks for a child’s developmental growth, particularly in the first five years of life.

Brooklyn Children’s Museum (BCM) adapts developmental frameworks to inform and guide exhibition development from concept through design. Consciously applying a developmentally appropriate approach helps ensure our products connect with children—those energetic, raucous, curious and infinitely varied creatures who tumble through our doors everyday—in meaningful and relevant ways.

Why Frameworks are Useful

Frameworks indicate the potential range of engagement and approach to proposed exhibition concepts and content for our target audience, children ages 4-11. They are created for and by the exhibition team so the findings become part of the team’s thinking and become a platform upon which all other work builds. Outside evaluators often work with us to do literature reviews and help with front-end interviews, all other research and writing is done in-house. Frameworks can concentrate the team’s effort on audience from the start; focus content and experience goals on those that make sense to children; and direct exhibition evaluation. Ultimately this saves time, money and effort by filtering out approaches that won’t be effective early in the process. What frameworks can’t do is: determine what children don’t know and what they need to learn; help create an exhibition that will speed learning or hasten development; serve as an assessment tool for audience; or justify developmentally inappropriate content objectives.

	Pre- K -5	5 - 7	7 - 9	9 - 11
Understanding Culture & Difference	Others not different from self.	Sees differences but does not attach judgments to differences.	Reciprocal perspective. Aware how others might view one's thoughts or feelings.	Third person or mutual perspective. Ability to understand neutral perspective.
Learning Through Activity	Hands-on manipulatives. Repeating patterns. Loves being read to.	Loves to ask questions. Learns best through discovery and process.	Likes using real materials. Loves to dramatize. Gender divergence.	Can do delicate work. Enjoys challenges of skill. Interest in rules. Music aids concentration.
Relevant Social Studies Themes	Myself and others, my family, my neighborhood and school, holidays and traditions.	Families, friends, school, jobs, cultural differences, legends and music from different cultures.	Our country and world, history of culture, cultural diversity, people and traditions.	Current events, geography, immigration, industry, local and world history.
Physical Development	AGE 4: Clumsy, spills common. Enjoys large muscle play and activity. Hard to sit still.	AGE 6: Fingers are tools. Falls backwards out of chairs. Works standing up. Has trouble balancing on a line.	AGE 9: Increased coordination. Races against clock. Increased fine motor control. Rough housing (boys).	AGE 11: Vast appetite for food, talking, and activity. Constant motion, restless. Confident fine motor. Loves team work.

Figure 1. Sample Developmental Framework (Things in Common Literature Review, Selinda Research Associates; Yardstick: Children in the Classroom Ages 4-1, Chip Wood; Your 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10-14 Year Old, Gessell Institute for Human Development; Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies, National Council for the Social Studies)

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Gathering the Data

Our frameworks are built upon data from four avenues of research: literature reviews, front-end evaluation, curriculum reviews, and child development from pre-k through age 11. A literature review explores what researchers across a variety of disciplines have already learned about our audience's understanding of our proposed subject matter. Front-end audience interviews and observations assess their knowledge of and interest in our projected concept and topic. An examination of relevant curriculum themes informs how the exhibition might support formal learning goals and school programming. Finally we consider children's capabilities at various ages related to the specific exhibition themes, and social learning that can be supported through activities in an informal environment.

We begin with questions to understand children's general physical, intellectual, and social development:

- What are children's social contexts for learning?
- How do they process information and experiences at various points in their development?
- What are their abilities and readiness for

attempting and completing physical tasks at various points?

- What are the gender differences?
- What are children's general stages of readiness for learning about others?

The literature review, front-end evaluation, and curriculum reviews examine how our audience might engage with specific content or concepts. For example, for our project on global cultures, World Brooklyn, some questions were:

- What are the primary characteristics of children's understandings of culture?
- When and how do these understandings develop?
- What are their frames of reference for understanding the world—self, family, school, friends, etc.? When do these references expand or change? school, friends, etc.? When do these references expand or change?
- When and how do they process differences in people?
- When and how are these themes introduced and expanded in school?

Integrating the Data

The framework presents an intersection of key attributes through and across targeted age

“Reaching family audiences means knowing who they are, why they come, their needs and interests, and their readiness to engage and learn.”

ranges: children’s developmental readiness, understanding of content, and formal education themes. We tend to summarize our research into a large one-page chart (full disclosure, it’s an 11” x 17” page) that is simple to post and access. The goal is to create something that won’t get buried in a file drawer and forgotten. Figure one is a very abbreviated and over generalized example of what a completed chart might look like. Read vertically, it provides a depth of understanding for one audience segment. Read horizontally, it provides a breadth of the potential range of engagement and understanding across our audience.

For example, looking at physical development we learn, not surprisingly, that children are incapable of being still. Indeed six-year olds tend to fall backwards out of chairs and prefer to work standing up—important considerations when designing space and activities.

Applying the Framework

Guided by the framework, we create a protocol for iterative formative evaluation, of concepts, activity, and design with audience through the design development phase. Where the framework intersects and resonates with our evaluation findings informs the exhibition’s experience and design. These insights are triangulated with what we know about our visitor demographics and from research on family learning.

Remember—Kids Rule

At the risk of stating the obvious: *families* are adults plus kids. Our goal is to reach families through meaningful experiences that can be shared by both constituencies. Kids set the pace and agenda of museum visits. Understanding their needs and interests is key to creating

effective exhibitions that resonate with everyone in the family through engaging activity, relevant content, and accessible design. Carefully constructed and consistently applied developmental frameworks can be roadmaps for an exhibition team’s journey: they help plan your trip, provide direction when you get lost, and let you know when you’ve arrived.

Ask the Right Questions and They Will Come: How to Reach a Young Audience **by Marcia Z. MacRae**

Whenever possible, the DuPage Children’s Museum (DCM) strives to create a learning environment where children can explore “the real thing”—real tools in the *Construction House*, real air blowers in *Air Works*, etc. Developing an art gallery of professional works that help children explore artists’ creative connections with a subject through interactive exhibits meets the Museum’s arts mission in several ways. The gallery offers children encounters with “the real thing”, it fosters problem-solving skills, and it promotes the integration of art with math and science. Yet, we wanted to start where children really are.

Young children are egocentric—they are only interested in things that are central to their lives and experiences. They will only look at what interests them—even if it is the fancy light switch on the wall next to the Picasso. Our gallery goal is simple: we want children to look at art without a facilitator asking them to do so. And if we want them to look at the art, we have to know what will interest them and

“Young children are egocentric—they are only interested in things that are central to their lives and experiences.”

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how to install it. We realized that to identify appropriate concepts and objects for exhibition we would need to develop new ways of testing and interviewing that were suitable for young children.

To find out if two and three year olds perceive movement in a still image, we showed children numerous images, including an untitled piece by Keith Haring of funny figures that appear to be dancing. I asked, “Are the figures moving or standing still?” All the children knew they were moving, “because of the little lines.” Keith Haring always put little movement lines next to his figures. Similarly, children alluded to lines of dust trailing behind cars in paintings as the same sort of movement lines. With permission of the Haring estate, I used Photoshop to take out the little lines and asked again. Children as young as two still perceived movement because they felt the figures could not simply hold those movement-filled poses.

How would children draw movement? Without calling attention to any one aspect of how painters bring movement into their works, I asked the children for drawings. From slithering snakes to helicopters, some children as young as age three recognizably incorporated those lines in their drawings. We concluded that young children had the ability to use several types of visual cues to discern movement in a still image.

We knew “home” was a good theme for an exhibit, and thought the art that decorated their homes would be a familiar connection, but our testing showed we were on the wrong track.

Interviews went something like this:

“Do you have art at home?”

“*Oh, yes. We have glitter, markers and glue.*”

“What about things that your parents put up on the wall just to look at?”

“*My mom puts my pictures up on the refrigerator.*”

“What about things that you have not made?”

“*My mom puts up pictures of my brothers and me on the stairs.*”

We were reminded: children are egocentric. They primarily recognize the art that revolves around them.

I went back with a new question, but asked it in two different ways. First, I interviewed children, asking, “You can stay many places, but you have one special place that you know is your home. What makes that place special enough to be called “home”? The number one answer was, “That is where my toys are.” Yet, when interviewing very young children drawings often reveal answers that you will never hear about in their words. Regardless of what they said in interview, almost one hundred percent of the children’s drawings were of families. Based on these findings, instead of art in the home we devoted an entire section of the exhibition to family, including a place for children to draw and post their own family portraits next to artworks exploring the same thing.

Observation and evaluation in the gallery have taught us a great deal about what types of artworks will get ready attention from our family audience. We’ve noticed that flat paintings are more likely to be ignored regardless of their content. A detailed painting in our upcoming exhibition, ***Animals in ArtLand: Wild Wings***, will be placed under a rolling magnifier. We hope children will be interested in using the mechanism and look at the painting along the way.

“And children’s museums also have something that most other museums do not: a primarily pre-literate audience.”

A developmental knowledge of children may get you into the ballpark of developing an exhibition that will interest your audience, but that is not enough. Children express themselves in different ways. Whether you interview or ask for drawings, if you want to know what they think—ask and observe.

Designing for Family Learning by Gail Ringel

Like other museums, children's museums have communication goals for exhibits and experiential aspirations for the audience. And children's museums also have something that most other museums do not: a primarily pre-literate audience. Much of our audience still travels in strollers with baggies of cheerios and little juice boxes in tow. So what does communication look like with this crowd? 15% are kids age 6 – 15, 28% are kids age 2 – 5, and 10% are under one year old. We've also come to realize the significance of the fact that fully half of our audience is adult. They might be spending a lot of time managing snacks and tracking down stragglers but we also want them to have fun, so adults have found a special place in our communication strategy.

In some ways, strategies for reaching a family audience look a lot like strategies for reaching any audience: it's good to know what people's preconceptions are, and it's good to use things that are familiar as bridges to the new or exotic. One exhibit developed by Boston Children's Museum provides several relevant examples. *Five Friends from Japan* was designed to introduce families to Japanese culture and its goals were to communicate:

- There are similarities and differences between the U.S. and Japan;

- There's diversity among children and families in Japan, and
- Tradition is important in Japan, but so is modern pop culture.

We divided our family audience into several groups, designing different activities and messages for different age ranges of children and their adult companions. Then we used front-end evaluation to discover their preconceptions about Japan. We learned that kids believed Japanese food is all sushi, all Japanese kids are smart and work hard in school, and traditional clothing, sports, and architecture are the rule.

So of course, we developed an exhibit in which there are many kinds of food but no sushi and one of our five exhibit subjects, Yusuke, is a gregarious boy who loves sports and laments that he's a lousy student. There are lots of images of children—always in casual clothes much like those American kids would wear, and we see an intriguing mix of traditional home settings and quite modern ones that look very familiar to American audiences; the Japanese exhibit subjects love traditional kendo sword play, and also adore baseball.

The exhibit experience begins in a typical Japanese elementary schoolroom and from there, visitors go on “home visits” where they meet and get to know five different Japanese children. The classroom is great, because Americans immediately recognize it as a classroom but are intrigued by activities like “group cleaning of the school” or “group lunch service”. Even more gratifying, Japanese visitors seem delighted to find themselves in a fairly accurate reproduction of their own early school experience.



Ken welcomes you, dressed in his baseball uniform.

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Dramatic role playing in the tofu shop.

Using short, direct messages allows both children and adults to get their bearings and act as guides for one another. In Aisa's home visit, she introduces us to her family's tofu shop. There are great hands-on, role playing activities and a video showing the fascinating process of artisanal tofu production. The intro panel has a very simple message welcoming you to the shop, and if you eavesdrop, you can hear parents saying things like, "Oh, let's go inside the tofu shop," to their children. People are often looking for guideposts in exhibitions and ways of making sense of things for their children. We aren't shy about providing clues, and making them obvious.

Repetition of messages is also extremely helpful. We knew from evaluation that both kids and adults often confuse China and Japan so when writing the exhibit copy, we decided to include specific references to Japan in about 90% of the graphics. We really wanted people to differentiate, and to know that this exhibit was about one specific place. Images also helped to reinforce the exhibit content and we chose

them carefully to convey specific messages about Japanese children and their culture. Seeing a large image of young Ken all decked out in his baseball uniform immediately grabbed the attention of our young visitors and told a powerful story.

Finally, during exhibit design, we try to focus on the different roles parents and children play as visitors in our museum. Since half our audience is adult, providing experiences that engage adults as well as kids is really critical. Parents make great play partners for their kids, and when they understand the thinking behind an exhibit activity, they often engage on a whole new level. They might observe their child's behavior more carefully, and make suggestions that help children achieve greater depth in their own interactions and learning. Designing activities that invite multiple participants, including "hooks" for an older audience, providing chairs that are adult communicate that parents are welcome, that their attention is valued, and that they can play an important part in their family's museum experience. ☀

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2106: Looking Back at the Next 100 Years

by Wayne LaBar, Neil Bremer, Dan Spock and James Walther

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James Walther is the Director of the National Atomic Museum. He may be contacted at jkwalth@sandia.gov.

From panel's recent visit to the future—a look “back” at next 100 years of museum and exhibition milestones.

Be afraid. Be very afraid.

2010

The hottest reality show of the 21st century is *Museum Survivor*. The highest-ranking episode was when competing museum departments fought to build a working raft in the fastest time. The Exhibit Installers and Art Handlers scored first with their construction of a raft out of twigs and lots of hemp.

2012

The world wide web fully entered the museum world with the opening in London of the Wikimuseum, a museum run by Wikipedia.com. Right on its heels was Google.museum—a website locating any exhibit around the world. Finally at the end of the year, MyMuseum at the MyPlace.com site opened where frustrated museum staff virtually argue about such things as visitor identity, meaning making and continuing the endless debate on the value of labels.

2020

The American Museum of Natural History announced the outsourcing of many museum operations to the Bangalore Curatorial and Museum Services. The museum promised that this would improve visitor services as guests would encounter no longer than a “5 minute” wait for interpretation.

2023

This year marked a major controversy between the Field Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago participating in the new reality show *Museum Director Swap*, when both staff's would

not let their swapped director go home. Each side felt that the fact that their new leader had no idea what the museum did was an improvement in its operation.

2051

The new International Spy Museum opened. The organization's attendance numbers grew steadily over the last century and there was no shortage of relevancy or new content with the increasing anxiety over security and the rise of what social scientists dubbed the new “surveillance society”. They quickly outgrew their first building and creating an expanded facility by purchasing the Pentagon Building, which eclipsed the combined museums of the Smithsonian Institution in size.

2055

Start of the Human Download Project by the former IMLS organization which curates the lives of every human within the United States, by being able to download a person's consciousness into a computer network. A complication of this effort is that through this process life continues without a body, resulting in the loss of a traditional museum funding source where senior donors “matriculate” bequeathing collections and capital. On benefit is that volunteer departments are dealing with a bonanza of “digital” volunteers for digital tours and answering machine messages.

2057

Marking its 100th anniversary Historic Levittown opened its door to visitors, setting the standard for living history sites in offering all-inclusive history immersion vacation packages. This 10 block area of Levittown, PA was rescued from the wrecking ball and was painstakingly restored to its post-WWII

appearance. Even the mature trees have been removed to approximate the authentic appearance of a new suburban subdivision. In addition to early 1960s costumed interpreters visitors can witness innovative public programs such as *Trailer Trash Nights*, combining theatrical performances and visitor immersion re-enactments.

2069

Known as the Berkeley museum uprising, an alteration occurred at SFMOMA between two groups of museums visitors. On one hand there were the "Berkeley podders" a group of visitors who believe that the most realistic and the only way one was meant to experience a museum was through the use of mp3 tours and delivered through portable sound and image players. While demonstrating they were confronted by the "chippers" who believe that one must turn to using the new implanted chip technology being sold to the public by Applesoft Inc. Facts are sketchy about this even as the museum only solicited feedback on this event through small yellow index cards available at the info desk.

2070

The Metropolitan Museum of Art celebrated its 200th anniversary with the opening of a new exhibition titled...*All the Stuff They Want Us to Give Back*.

2075

The cultural phenomena of museum architecture "super buildings" reached its pinnacle in the new Frankie Gehry (son of the 20th century architect Fran Gehry) designed Guggenheim Liechtenstein. This is the first museum that has no exhibit halls or galleries. Frankie Gehry stated: "We were always told architects never understood how to make

exhibits spaces that function well so we believe we solved this dilemma but not putting any at all in this new facility."

2078

Amazingly the Met closes its doors for the final time after being acquired by the Getty Museum in a hostile takeover and its various departments broken up and sold off. A Getty representative, when asked if they sought the largest collection of art in the world simply said, "How much you want for it?"

2083

At the AAM conference the debate on Intelligent Design was answered once and when, to the amazement of museum scientists around the world, God spoke to those gathered at the American Association of Museums annual conference and stated, "Come on...you call that intelligent? You should see what my brother Larry made!"

2088

AAM releases a study demonstrating that museums felt the rising interest rates and inflation experienced throughout the 22nd Century. The bad news was museum admissions averaged \$275 per adult, but the good news was Tuesdays are still free.

2106

At the 200th anniversary of AAM, Museum professionals were delighted mid-century when the eagerly awaited day arrived to re-animate Ed Able. Mr. Able was a driving force during the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries for American museums. ☀

This article is a condensed version of the session. Some stories were removed to protect the innocent.

Nineteenth Annual Excellence in Exhibition Competition

About the Competition

The *Nineteenth Annual Excellence in Exhibition Competition* recognizes outstanding achievement in the exhibition format from all types of museums, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens and any other types of non-commercial institutions offering exhibitions to the public. The competition is the joint project of the following AAM Standing Professional Committees (SPCs): Curators Committee (CURCOM), the National Association for Museum Exhibition (NAME), the Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation (CARE) and the Education Committee (EdCom).

Eligibility

Any non-commercial institution offering exhibitions to the public may participate. Exhibitions may have been designed by a

commercial firm for a non-commercial institution. Each institution that enters must have a team member that is a member of AAM. The exhibition must have opened to the public between November 29, 2004 and November 29, 2006. To be eligible, exhibits may not have previously won this competition. Exhibitions may only be submitted once to the competition.

Entry Fees

A \$60 fee is required for each exhibit entered. Make checks payable to the AAM Curators Committee. For multiple entries, submit one check for the full amount.

Notification and Awards

Each winning exhibition will be featured in a program session at the 2007 AAM Annual Meeting in Chicago and a representative from each winning institution will be asked to do a

short presentation. Winners will also receive national recognition in the AAM publication *Museum News*.

Competition Policies

The SPC sponsors are not responsible for lost or damaged entries. All entry materials become the property of the SPCs and cannot be returned. Entrants agree to allow AAM and SPC sponsors to use photographs of winning exhibitions, at no charge, in AAM publications. Entrants warrant that they have the right to allow such use. Institutions will be credited in any published reference to winning entries. All materials (with the exception of exhibit budgets) will be displayed during the Marketplace of Ideas at the 2007 AAM Annual Meeting in Chicago.

To Enter:

Submit five copies of each entry on CD-ROM, and one copy in print format. Label each CD clearly with the name of the institution and exhibition. To facilitate judging, please include each component in the order listed below and confine your answers to the word limits as indicated.

The following documents are referenced in the application requirements, and may be found online at: www.N-A-M-E.org, www.edcom.org, www.curcom.org, www.care-aam.org, or from the competition coordinator.

Entry Form
Standards for Museum Exhibitions
Exhibition Budget Worksheet

1. *Entry Form* (see next page)

2. *Institutional Profile*: (500 words). Provide general information about your institution. This may include number of visitors annually, number of employees, description of the collection, titles of permanent exhibitions, number of special exhibitions opened annually, square footage of exhibition galleries, and other information relevant to your project.

3. *Narrative*: (2500 words.) The Council of Standing Professional Committees of AAM has developed Standards for Museum

Exhibitions and Indicators of Excellence. Provide a narrative describing how your exhibition reflects these standards, and why it represents excellence.

4. *Exhibition Staff*: (500 words) List key in-house and contracted staff and describe their roles in the exhibition planning process.

5. *Exhibition Walkthrough*: In a Power Point document containing up to 20 images, provide a visual walkthrough of the exhibition. Each image should be clearly keyed to the exhibition floor plan (see below). Include a 2-3 sentence explanation for each image in the Power Point notes. The purpose of the images is to give a sense of the exhibition as a whole. We strongly encourage you to submit images of the public interacting with your exhibition.

6. *Floor Plan*: A single sheet keyed to walkthrough. Include square footage and scale.

7. *Exhibition Budget Worksheet*: Only final exhibit budgets submitted in this format will be accepted.

8. *Audience Awareness and Evaluation*: (1500 words) Identify the exhibition's target audiences. Describe the thinking or studies the exhibition team engaged in to gain insight into the interests

of these audiences, and provide real evidence and examples of how this understanding was considered or incorporated into the planning process. Briefly summarize any studies the exhibition team conducted during development or after opening to understand the impact of the exhibition on its audiences and its relation to the project's goals.

9. *Educational Approach*: (1500 words) Provide an overview of how the exhibition supports your institution's educational mission, meets specific learning outcomes, and provides multiple levels and points of entry into content. Describe how the exhibition incorporated community in the development process, if appropriate to your project, and how it reflects a diversity of perspectives. Describe the programs for school and/or public audiences that were developed to accompany the exhibition, and explain how these worked in tandem with the exhibition's goals.

10. *Labels*: Include the introductory label (as you define it) and up to 5 additional labels that best communicate the look, feel and content of the exhibition. Labels should be presented in graphic form as they appear in the exhibition, not just as text.

Entry Form

Museum Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone/Email _____

Contact Person _____

Exhibition Title _____

Date Exhibition opened to the public: _____

Date Exhibition closed or will close: _____

Institution's operating budget for the most recently completed fiscal year _____

Type of Exhibit

- Traveling
- Temporary
- Permanent

Is your institution a 501c-3? _____

Are you a member of AAM? _____

If not, provide the name of one AAM member on your exhibition team.

Please send entry materials (5 CD-ROM and 1 printed copy) to:

Lindy Hankins

Exhibition Competition Coordinator

10 Michigan Drive

Hudson, MA 01749

617-823-9292

lindy@farnerh.com

**PLEASE POSTMARK ENTRIES BY
JANUARY 5, 2007**

Direct Exhibition Costs	
Fabrication and Installation <small>(includes construction of all exhibit elements as well as prototypes, media, interactives, mannequins, painting, photo reproduction, lighting supplies, and similar costs)</small>	\$
Staff expenses <small>(includes travel, books, office supplies, etc.— excludes salaries)</small>	\$
Collections <small>(includes conservation, shipping, loans, storage and other related expenses)</small>	\$
Consultants <small>(includes fees and expenses related to content experts, designers, evaluators, etc.)</small>	\$
Total Direct Exhibition Costs	\$
Additional Project Costs	
Educational Programs and Materials <small>(includes presenters' honoraria and expenses, printing, curriculum materials, etc.)</small>	\$
Publications <small>(includes print and electronic materials including catalogues, gallery guides, websites)</small>	\$
Marketing <small>(includes advertising, publicity, and related costs)</small>	\$
Total Additional Project Costs	\$
GRAND TOTAL	\$
(Direct Exhibition Costs + Additional Project Costs)	



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Subscriptions

Membership in NAME includes subscription to Exhibitionist, along with other benefits. See the membership application on page 89.

It is also possible to subscribe to Exhibitionist, without the other benefits of NAME membership, at a rate of \$25 per year (two issues) for U.S. subscriptions, or \$45 per year for international subscriptions. Send your check made out to NAME to:

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Back issues of *Exhibitionist* may be purchased for \$12.50 each on our website, www.N-A-M-E.org.

How to Contribute to *Exhibitionist*

Exhibitionist is published by the National Association for Museum Exhibition (NAME), the Standing Professional Committee on Exhibition of the American Association of Museums (AAM). NAME enhances the cultural landscape by advancing the value and relevance of exhibitions through dialogue among individuals, museum leaders and the public. NAME promotes excellence and best practices; identifies trends and recent innovations; provides access to resources; promotes professional development; and cultivates leadership. Opinions expressed in *Exhibitionist* are those of the authors, and may not represent the policies of NAME and/or AAM.

Upcoming Issues:

Spring 2007 – Request for Proposal (RFP)

Guest Editor: Paul Orselli, paul@orselli.net

Fall 2007 – Best of the 2007 American Association of Museums (AAM)

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Yes! I want to add NAME membership to my AAM membership. My AAM member number is:

Yes! I want to join NAME, I am not a member of the American Association of Museums. I have checked the appropriate categories below and to the right and have enclosed my NAME and AAM membership payment.

Mission

The National Association for Museum Exhibition (NAME) enhances the cultural landscape by advancing the value and relevance of exhibitions through dialogue among individuals, museum leaders and the public.

Activities

- Disseminates information on the conception, planning, design, conservation, fabrication, installation, and maintenance of museum exhibitions.
- Develops and conducts exhibit-related workshops and seminars.
- Provides products and services resources.
- Represents professional interests on a national level.

Benefits

- Two issues of the *Exhibitionist* magazine
 - Two issues of the NAME newsletter
 - Six issues of *Exhibit Builder* magazine*
 - Bi-annual membership directory
- *Not included for international members

NAME Membership

- | | |
|---|------|
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*International members add \$20

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Museum Staff, Independent Professionals and Non-profit Organization Staff

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*Discount applies to staff and trustees of AAM Museum Members only
Museum Member # (if known) _____

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**Students must provide copy of current student ID from a degree granting institution.

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Museum (for museum/organizations that operate a museum)

Associate (for museum-related non-profits)
Dues based on annual operating budget.

Budget \$ _____ Multiplied by 0.001 = \$ _____

Non-Profit For-Profit

Minimum Dues are \$100. Maximum Dues for Museum are \$15,000. Maximum Dues for Associate Members are \$5,000.

- Museum Membership includes a complimentary individual membership for both the CEO/Director and Chair of the museum board (head of governing group or to whom the CEO reports).
- Associate Membership includes a complimentary individual membership for the CEO/Director only.
- Institution receives one NAME membership for each NAME dues paid.

I am authorized to request AAM membership for this organization.

Signature _____

AAM Commercial Membership

Commercial/Company

- \$650 (covers two employees)
 \$100 for each additional staff member:

Names _____

Each employee receiving NAME benefits must pay appropriate NAME membership.

NAME dues amount \$ _____

AAM dues amount + \$ _____

Total enclosed = \$ _____

Payment Method

- Check (payable to AAM)
 MasterCard
 Visa
 American Express

Please return your application and dues payment to: **American Association of Museums**, Department 4002, Washington, DC 20042-4002.

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