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ISSUE  
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# Chatter Marks

A journal of the Anchorage Museum, dedicated to creative and critical thinking and ideas of past, present and futures for the Circumpolar North and the planet.

*Chatter Marks* are a series of often crescent-shaped gauges chipped out of the bedrock as a glacier drags rock fragments underneath it.

Present since the last ice age, most of the world's glaciers are now shrinking or disappearing altogether as the climate gets warmer. As they mark the passage of deep time, our landscapes are also indicators of our tomorrow.

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Welcome to the fifth issue of *Chatter Marks*, focused on the museum field.  
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FUTURE of  
MUSEUMS

Our future looks far different than our yesterday. Climate change, a pandemic, pivotal conversations around systemic racism, and decolonization rein force the need for museums to participate, prepare and respond. Museums can help us to na vigate the present and play a critical role in posing questions about the future, encouraging the visi on and imagination needed for tomorrow. Museums help people find meaning – it is the co re of service and their essential value. Museums can be part of a shift in thinking and action, able to prompt and provide narratives that define the now and the next. But first, they, too must consid er changes and evolutions to museum practice. As part of a call to action, this issue examines id eas of current and future practice and programs.



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# Mission Matters

GAIL ANDERSON

Simply put, the confluence of issues in society, the external environment, and the world have created new realities and pressures that require museums and museum leaders to examine and rethink how museums can be relevant and more impactful for our citizens and communities.

Museums are not islands: museums exist within a cultural, social, political, economic, and natural environment in which they must play a part. A museum as an unchallenged, venerable institution is a concept that no longer exists.<sup>1</sup> No institution, whether for-profit or nonprofit, can elude public scrutiny or avoid being the focus of a public outcry. Issues impacting individuals, communities, and nations are interrelated and tie to a range of systemic issues such as immigration, racial inequities, local and global economies, disparities of the haves and have-nots, wars fought over water, religious rights, resources, and land rights—these are just a few realities happening in and around museums.

This amalgam of contemporary realities presents an unprecedented opportunity for all museums to undertake holistic institutional assessment, examine operational assumptions, leverage their unique resources, and determine the most impactful ways of being that make a substantive difference in their communities and in the lives of a diverse public. It is a moment to envision a more responsive, visionary, and vital role for museums that contributes to healthy, vibrant communities. By virtue of being an organization in service to the public, there is an ethical and moral responsibility to take actions to make the world better.<sup>2</sup> Museums must advance inclusion and equity for people of all backgrounds, present the untold stories and histories, and act and care for the fragile environment of our planet.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, some museums are uniquely positioned to respond to specific topics and issues in depth by virtue of their content emphasis such as science museums addressing climate change, yet all museums need to do their part to protect the environment regardless of the focus of their institution. This is the time to leverage the role of museums as contributors to a better, stronger, more just world and to become positive agents of change in their communities. Every museum has a responsibility to look at the broader external environment and specific local issues, and to select a path forward that resonates and responds to their geographic location, their communities, and the unique resources of their institution.

A relevant and strategic mission for the twenty-first-century museum has the power to galvanize board and staff around instigating meaningful change in communities and the lives of others.

At its core, a mission explains why a museum exists, how it makes a difference in the lives of others, and how it impacts the future, which implies it explains who it is for.<sup>4</sup> The mission is the heart of the institution, its compass, and the grounding force that guides all that a museum does and inspires the people who work there. The mission forms the foundation from which agreement about the role of the museum is clarified, which is especially important as museums undertake transformative and systemic change. A mission is the anchor within a strategic framework alongside a vision, values, operating principles, and impact statements, to name a few, that guide the museum toward its greatest potential and relevancy.<sup>5</sup>

A strategic mission plays a central role in the identity of an institution—it conveys to its public why it is there, and it communicates to audiences the ways that they can engage with the museum. A relevant mission translates how the museum connects with the contemporary world, builds meaning with its audiences, challenges assumptions and the status quo, and invites new voices into the larger conversation and dialogue that each museum can facilitate. A strong clear mission, as a management tool, should be clear enough to inform who will lead and advance the mission, what skills and experiences are needed in the staff who work there, what the nature of the work is, and what impact the museum seeks in service to the public. It is like a pebble dropped in the lake: the mission ripples through all aspects of the museum.

Missions matter. Taking the time to define the right mission for each museum is a collective effort and one essential to being able to state clearly “this is who we are, this is what we stand for, this is who we serve, this is how we make a difference, we want to do this with and for you.” If the mission is not crafted and thought through with intent, and there isn’t the courage to state the institution’s conviction for its place in the world, museums run the risk of being disconnected, marginalized, and irrelevant to their communities and the public at large, even the threat of closure.

In the end, each museum has a direction and a focus it will choose. It is about being deliberate and defining a realm in which it will engage the public in meaningful experiences and ideas. Whether a museum is national in focus, a specialty museum, a historic house, or a science institution, it has an obligation to be clear in its intent and define how everything the museum does advances the mission. Every museum will not appeal to all, but each museum can put its stake in the ground and declare its greater purpose that is right for its location, community, and place in the world, its unique characteristics, and the leadership and capacity to deliver the mission.

### QUALITIES OF RELEVANT MUSEUMS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Museums that exude relevancy in the twenty-first century reflect distinct qualities throughout their operations and their vision for the future. These fundamental assertions about museums and thus their mission statements are tied to the greater impact that museums can have.

#### Relevant museums in the twenty-first century:

- Place the public, communities, and audiences at the center of what they do through meaningful engagement that makes a difference in the lives of people. This fundamental responsibility upholds the museum’s social contract with the public to act for the greater good.

- Balance external realities with internal capacity to find the place of greatest impact for the benefit of others. Tapping into the inherent and unique qualities of a museum must be balanced with understanding how to translate contemporary realities into the work each museum undertakes.

- Reflect inclusivity and diversity at all levels of the museum, including representation on boards and staff, the nature of the work undertaken, the voices and histories included, the balance of content and perspectives embraced, and an inclusive organizational culture. This requires that each museum has named and grappled with underlying biases, assumptions, practices, and modes of behavior that may have supported elitist and exclusionary practices. This leads to reframing new principles and approaches for greater inclusion and success.

- Act with institutional-wide responsibility to uphold environmentally sensitive actions in support of caring for the fragile planet. All museums must do their part in this urgent reality of climate change facing our world and impacting generations to come. Museums must lead by example and empower the public to do their part.

- Facilitate experiences, dialogues, ideas, and engagement onsite and out in the world that are meaningful, inclusive, and respectful of a diverse public. This requires a commitment

to lead with humility and listen attentively as a core tenet of operations, welcoming new perspectives and participation as an ongoing way of working and learning.

- Act with integrity, accountability, and transparency, and uphold legal and ethical standards, and financially responsible practices in support of the mission and nonprofit requirements of operation.

In the end, the challenges for today’s museums require leaders to act with conviction, courage, and commitment to ask the tough questions, redefine what no longer works, retain what remains useful, stay the course for the longterm to transform museum practices, and undertake the fundamental changes that will be necessary to achieve and sustain relevancy. Significant change takes time and will evolve as new challenges and realities emerge.

### EMBEDDED CONSTRUCTS CREATE BARRIERS TO RELEVANT MUSEUMS

Embedded constructs must be addressed to get at the heart of reframing missions, given that many ideologies are so intertwined into thinking and practices that moving forward could be impaired without rigorous examination. Constructs refer to a range of deeply rooted beliefs, structures, and practices such as unexamined assumptions, academic frameworks, systemic racism, and inherent privilege. The following are a few examples of constructs impacting museums.

**Decolonization in Museums**

Anthropology museums typically hold collections that are based on an academic anthropology framework focused on studying non-Western cultures. Thus, most anthropological collections reflect cultural artifacts of indigenous peoples from the Americas, Africa, and continents across the globe. These diverse cultures were the subject of research, study, and observation by many of the anthropologists of the 1800s and early 1900s, epitomizing the fascination of studying the “other” and the exotic. Many artifacts were stolen and taken to amass cultural collections acquired with disrespect to the people who created them, used them, and attributed sacred and spiritual meanings central to their identity and cultural vitality.<sup>6</sup> In today’s world, a museum that still adheres to the ideology of traditional anthropology advances an imbalanced, racist, and colonial view of the history of humans while sustaining cultural objectification practices.<sup>7</sup>

The San Diego Museum of Man, founded as a traditional anthropology museum of global cultures, has shifted the lens to be about understanding human behavior and interactions rather than using the academic anthropology lens. The museum has initiated a decolonization approach to deconstruct this nineteenth- and twentieth-century exploitive and voyeuristic mindset.<sup>8</sup>

As SDMoM changed its direction in 2010, with exhibitions like “RACE: Are We So Different?” [a traveling exhibition from the Science Museum of Minnesota], it set the stage for . . . a lengthy process of self-examination, and . . . a commitment to institutional decolonization. American and European museums have long been associated with the formation and continuation of empires. Many were created to house and display the material and biological remains, and intangible culture, of colonized Indigenous communities in support of a national narrative predicated upon the concept of white supremacy. As a result, museums have often helped perpetuate many endemic social ills, including that of structural racism.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that, as part of reframing the work of the San Diego Museum of Man, the board and staff are planning a name change that reflects all of humanity not conveyed with the current name.

While this is a contemporary example of decolonizing efforts featured in this book, several other institutions such as the Glenbow Museum in the late 1970s initiated a rigorous process of decolonization, where 60 percent of the population are Native born. This effort was evident through featuring first-voice interpretation in exhibitions and mounting the largest repatriation of sacred objects in Canadian history. Similarly, the Museum of Northern Arizona engaged Hopi and Navajo elders in

the interpretation and representation of their culture and artifacts also in first voice in a major reinstallation in the late 1970s.

Particularly relevant to museums holding indigenous artifacts is the fact that for many cultures, in particular Native American tribes, the concept of keeping an object in perpetuity is antithetical to tribal customs and beliefs. The remarkable U.S. legislation, the Native American Graves and Protection Rights Act of 1990, acknowledged this disparity in museum and Native cultural concepts resulting in many objects being repatriated to their tribes. In some cases, memorandums of understanding have been established between museums and Native tribes for the safekeeping of cultural objects with the agreement that tribal leaders may borrow sacred and ceremonial objects for use in rituals. As one example, the Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff has such a memorandum of understanding with the Hopi Tribe.

**The Complexities of American Art**

A museum with American art in its name prompts a different set of questions: How is American defined? Does the art have to be created by an American citizen? Does this include an undocumented immigrant? Is there representation of female artists and the full spectrum of artists of color, male and female? This example points to the importance of addressing the underpinnings, definitions, and assumptions inherent in the history of a museum dedicated to American art or a museum dedicated to a nation’s artistic heritage. This can be an opportunity to generate thoughtful, inclusive, and empowering conversations that may lead to a new paradigm of public engagement, efforts to broaden representation in the collections, and a more expansive view of artists of diverse backgrounds, and thus a revised and inclusive mission.

**The Influence of the National Narrative**

The challenge of confronting historical misrepresentation and untruths in museums is one that some museums have been addressing in order to honor all the voices and experiences of a people, an event, or a place. This challenge is not limited to U.S. museums but is happening with museums across the globe when difficult truths and stories about abuse, racism, human atrocities, and war are not fully told.

In 2011, the Colombian Government signed Law 1448 which intends to provide comprehensive reparations to nearly 8 million victims of the internal armed conflict since 1985. This Law founded the National Center for Historical Memory (NCHM) with the objective of “designing, creating, and administrating a Museum of Memory, destined to achieve the strengthening of the collective memory regarding Colombia’s recent history of violence, making sure to combine efforts from the private sector,

civil society, international cooperation, and the state.” The National Memory Museum (NMM) constitutes thus as a symbolic reparation measure aiming to restore the dignity of victims, the public acceptance of wrongdoings, the preservation of historical memory, and guarantee the non-repetition of acts of violence and human rights violations.<sup>10</sup>

In the spring of 2018, the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, opened The National Memorial for Peace and Justice to honor the men, women, and children who were brutally killed through lynchings, beatings, burnings, and torture from the 1800s into the 1900s. At the same time, the Equal Justice Initiative opened The Legacy Museum, where the exhibition “From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration,” presents the evolving story of this horrific past connecting the history of slavery to contemporary forms of oppression, bias, and discriminatory actions. Bryan Stevenson, an attorney, and the executive director and visionary for both projects, believes the museum and the memorial will help tell the larger story and help “change the national narrative.”<sup>11</sup>

**CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND MUSEUM PRACTICES**

Just as the world changes, so too has the vision of some museum leaders regarding the role of their institution. Through the research for this book, several illustrative examples were found where museum leaders are undertaking transformative change, including new voices, abandoning elitist and exclusionary practices, and addressing contemporary issues.

**Issues-based Museums**

The Coastal Discovery Museum in Hilton Head, South Carolina, leverages the unique setting and fragility of the Lowcountry, the unique natural habitat along the South Carolina coastline, as a springboard into larger conversations about visitors taking responsibility as stewards for the planet.

The Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, embraces environmental consciousness holistically whether evidenced in a LEED building, internal best practices, or programs that help the visitor understand the interconnected relationship between humans and the plant kingdom.

The Anchorage Museum in Alaska is dedicated to addressing the pressing issues in the Arctic and the Circumpolar North. Through agreements with other museums in the other eight Arctic Nations, they have mounted, created, and addressed issues shared across the northern region of the world as vanishing glaciers, changing climates, and communities now underwater plague the North with pending global impact. At the Anchorage Museum the intersection of indigenous peoples in Alaska and the issues of the environment spotlight

ways to bring stories long kept separate into an integrated and informative way of thinking about the environment and Native cultures together.

The National Museums Liverpool in England, under the leadership of David Fleming, has leveraged its museums as places for addressing contemporary issues, controversy, social change, and social justice. This amalgam of institutions, the International Slavery Museum, the Museum of Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, and the World Museum, to name a few of them, has focused on contemporary issues and inclusion of the people in Liverpool, the United Kingdom, and beyond to heighten relevancy. Summing up his position, Fleming states:

I think that if museums wish to remain relevant in today’s society they need to make sure that they’re dealing with difficult issues—some of the issues that they have studiously avoided dealing with in the past. It’s the only way, really, to connect with modern people: we’ve got to more honest than we used to be.<sup>12</sup>

**Community-building Museums**

Some museums are inextricably linked to their communities, sometimes creating a vital lifeline for the health and well-being of a community, whether defined geographically or by cultural identification or other self-defined characteristic.

The Tamástslikt Cultural Institute in Oregon focuses on the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla values, beliefs, history, language, and cultural traditions. It is an urgent endeavor to represent and document the traditions through Elders’ voices, especially pressing as Native languages are endangered not just in this Native community but in many other tribes across the United States, Canada, and the world. Roberta Conner, the executive director at Tamástslikt, stated “the greatest sign of our success is when a member of the tribe entrusts us with their families’ treasures because they know we will care for those objects and tell their stories for generations to come.”<sup>13</sup>

The Anacostia Community Museum of the Smithsonian Institution was born out of a conviction to reflect and connect with an underserved, predominantly black community in Washington, DC, to tell their stories, and celebrate a community that had been marginalized. This organization continues to do groundbreaking work building upon John Kinard’s vision and groundbreaking work of the 1960s.<sup>14</sup>

A more recent story of a community-based museum is the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, where an institution on the brink of closure was saved through a reframing of purpose and mission to be by, for, and with the community. In Nina Simon’s perspective, she chronicles the journey of the reinvention that turned the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History into a community hub that has enlivened the city and become a magnet for building a vibrant level of public engagement.<sup>15</sup>

**Content-centered Museums**

For many museums, persistent questions from the public have demanded inclusion in historical accounts, and formerly unheard voices and stories reveal the full story of a community or people. In September 2017, the long-awaited National Museum of African American History and Culture opened on the Mall in Washington, DC. This Smithonian museum, many years in the making, tells the African American story that in turn tells the broader and more complete story laying bare the underbelly of American history around lynchings, slavery, and racist ideology in the United States. Lonnie Bunch, founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, stated in reference to the goals of the museum:

Understanding race, understanding our tortured history can help us with the world we live in today.<sup>16</sup> We are in a divided America, where race and issues of white supremacy are at the forefront of our conversations. I think the museum is a place that helps us explore things that are difficult, helps us explore where race matters and how it’s divided us. I also think people come because they believe that by looking at the history of America through an African- American lens, they’re finding moments of optimism, moments to believe that no matter how bad things are, you can effect change if you’re willing to struggle and to demand America live up to its stated ideals.<sup>17</sup>

The Museum of History of Polish Jews in Warsaw vision is to “create a platform for social dialogue . . . offering a profound, transformative experience and promoting new standards of relating to history.” Their mission statement is to “recall and preserve the memory of Polish Jews, contributing to the mutual understanding and respect amongst Poles and Jews as well as other societies of Europe and the world.”

The Kenya Wildlife Service is working against the clock to protect the wildlife within their national parks system. Simply put, their vision is “to save the last great species and places on earth for humanity.” This example highlights the urgency with which education and action is required in order to avoid irreparable damage and permanent loss.

**Experience-focused Museums**

Experience-focused museums are often attributed to childrens’ museums, interactive science museums, and historical sites. More and more, museums in all areas are integrating experiences into their approach for engaging the public.

In children’s museums, there is a focus on parent-child relationships, exploratory experiences, early childhood education, and the growth of toddlers and children into responsible and caring human beings. At the Bay Area Discovery Museum in Sausalito, California, their commitment to getting it right translates into the significant allocation of funds to undertake research on childhood education and creativity that informs decisions

and strategies, influences programmatic choices, and guides the way staff engage with visitors.

The Tenement Museum offers tours of the living quarters of poor, immigrant families in New York City between the 1860s and 1930s. The experience of walking through this site helps the visitor relive and feel the conditions of the people who lived there while striving to care for family members. With current issues around immigration, this museum is relevant to the issues of the day around immigration, prejudices, and deplorable working conditions.

The Museo Interactivo Economía in Mexico City focuses on “the use of economics as a lens for people to discover how the world works,” using interactive exhibitions and presentation of topics not typically featured in a museum setting.

All of the examples of leadership described in the prior pages are just a few ways that museums are contributing to the world in which they exist with goals to make a difference—some locally, some nationally, and others internationally.

**The Power of Collaboration to Lead Change**

Some members of the museum community have come together as leaders to instigate the necessary change that has been slow to manifest in museums. “Museums and Race: Transformation and Justice,” a convening organized by The Museum Group, held in January 2016 in Chicago, brought together leaders representing ethnic diversity and generations of museum professionals to discuss and outline strategies to help advance museums and the museum field into reflective and inclusive institutions with meaning and connections to a widely diverse public. One of the predominant discussion points was around the power of collaboration.<sup>18</sup> This convening was followed by workshops and conversations at the American Alliance of Museums meeting in Washington, DC, in the spring of 2016.

At the same time a group of visionaries and activists, participated in MASS Action, a group that has met once a year since 2016 at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and as a result of a collective effort produced the MASS Action Toolkit.<sup>19</sup> This toolkit is a manifestation of the group’s commitment to make accessible new ways of advancing equity and re-envisioning museums as integrated, connected, and inclusive institutions. Janeen Bryant, a participant in “Museums and Race” and MASS Action stated,

Diversity and its oft-used counterpart inclusion . . . should always be coupled with measurable tactics and a clear strategy for change. Any recommendations for a 21st-century reality require adaptability and recognition that we are no longer sure of where our goal posts are day to day. As a field, our drive, purpose, and curiosity require us to define a way of working beyond assimilation to . . . actualizing what museums could be in the future.<sup>20</sup>

Another collaborative effort is the Coalition of Museums for Climate Justice created and led by Robert Janes, former director of Glenbow Museum in Calgary. The mission of the coalition is “Building museums’ capacity to promote awareness, mitigation and resilience in the face of climate change.”<sup>21</sup> In a recent address at the Alberta Museums Association/Western Museums Association conference in Canada in 2017, Janes emphatically stated that the urgency for museums to take responsibility, and participate in addressing climate change, is now. Janes opines:

One challenge is the widely-held belief that museums must protect their neutrality, lest they fall prey to bias and special interest groups. The unspoken argument is that museums cannot risk doing anything that might alienate their audiences or sponsors, real or potential. This claim of neutrality underlies the belief that museums may abstain from addressing societal issues, because they have complex histories and unique missions which absolve them from greater accountability.<sup>22</sup>

In his address, he highlights two essential lessons from the LGBTQ community. The first is the need to have conversations about uncomfortable subjects, like queer rights and climate change, and the second is the need to focus on the immorality of inaction.<sup>23</sup> These examples of collaborations emerged because of inaction in the museum field evident by the avoidance of grappling with the issues of the day, and the uncomfortable reality of abdicating responsibility. The reality is that museums must change.

**THE ROLE OF A RELEVANT MISSION**

The role of a relevant mission is its alignment with the world in which it exists. A relevant and vibrant institution assumes a leadership position that befits who the museum is, where it is located, and its capacity to hit the right mark, role, and path forward. As the reader moves through the various chapters of this book, many more examples will be revealed with the goal of inspiring other museums to make a difference and enhance their impact.

This book presents a re-envisioned paradigm about missions and museums. The examples and discussions throughout this book highlight the need for inspired and visionary leaders who exhibit the highest level of humility and the courage to dismantle injurious, exclusionary, and outdated practices. The subsequent step is to reframe thinking, re-envision public engagement, and define an approach that makes a difference and by association becomes more relevant in this complex world.

Museums are in the intersection of choices. Choices about what the legacy of a museum will be. Choices about declaring why your museum matters. Choices about how to undertake the work that museums can uniquely do to make a difference. Choices about who the institution is really for and who it serves. Choices about how your museum and mission can impact change. Choices about how you will ensure that your museum remains relevant in the twenty-first century.

Take stock in the many visionary examples in this book and determine what courageous vision will be the legacy of your museum. Envision your museum as an integral player in your community, respond to issues that improve lives, and engage in ways that make your museum a contributor to a better world. The moment is now.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Gail Anderson is president of Gail Anderson & Associates (GA&A), working to transform museums and cultural organizations through building leadership capacity and expanding community and global relevance.

# Authentic Change in Museums:

## A Brief Field Guide to Renewal

ROBERT R. JANES

It is one thing for museums to undertake change because of financial pressures and the need to improve efficiency and effectiveness. It is radically different to acknowledge that museums are deeply entrenched in the broader histories of colonialism, globalization, and capitalism and require systemic change. As difficult as this is to admit, the majority of museums are closely bound up with the forces that have led the planet to the brink of ecological collapse; to the separation of human and more-than-human life; to the marginalization and oppression of Indigenous Peoples, and to the celebration of narratives dependent on unlimited economic growth. Yet, despite all the efforts to the contrary, the traditional commitment to preservation, interpretation, and education remain largely unchallenged by museum practitioners (Museums in 2020).

Nor have the majority of the world’s museums confronted the climate crisis, much less the spectre of social and ecological collapse, and they are effectively absent in the wide-ranging initiatives to confront these challenges. This is understandable, recognizing that museums are mainstream institutions and thus embody the general consciousness and values of the public at large. The public, in turn, is “culture-bound”, meaning that both individual and societal perspectives are restricted in outlook by belonging to a particular culture. In this instance, the North American frame of reference is the modern technological-industrial culture, with its particular values and aspirations.

In short, we are the products of the culture we are born into (Nelson 2020). We are now in need of new cultural frameworks to identify, explore and debunk the myths, perceptions and misperceptions that are inviting collapse and extinction, such as the belief that unlimited economic growth is possible and that there can be more growth through technology (Rees and Nelson 2020). It is by developing new cultural frameworks that museums can make a vital contribution. Museums of all kinds are in a position to invent a new future for their communities by creating an image and a story of a desirable future – the essential first step in its realization. Joanna Macy, a Buddhist scholar and activist, calls this story the Great Turning – “the transition from a doomed economy of industrial growth to a life-sustaining society committed to the recovery of our world” (Macy and Johnstone 2012: 26). It is time for museums to honor the public trust that has been gifted to them and participate in the creation of this new story.

Museums remain largely relegated to leisure and entertainment, and remain unrecognized as key civic and intellectual resources. We know that education is a core mission, but we must ask what sort of education is appropriate and necessary now? Society is in dire need of the critical education that confronts the destructive forces of colonialism, globalization, capitalism. Most museum managers and their governing authorities remain mired in the status quo, seeking new buildings, increased visitation, and consumer consumption. It is business as usual.

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9. Personal communication, Micah Parzen, PhD, JD, chief executive officer, San Diego Museum of Man, July 25, 2018.

10. Personal communication, Michael Andres Forero Parra, architect for the National Museum of Memory, Colombia, March 1, 2018.

11. A conversation with Bryan Stevenson on December 1, 2018, with members of The Museum Group, Montgomery, Alabama.

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23. Janes, “Museums and Climate Change Activism,” 2017.

**An Ecological Metaphor**

This persistent, maladaptive behavior reflects an elemental misunderstanding that plagues the organization and management of museums. An ecological metaphor is useful in examining this dysfunction, as ecology is about the relationships between organisms and their environments – dependent, independent, and interdependent relationships. (Janes 2016: 379). Museums have built their survival on being both materially dependent (for their economic well-being) and subjectively independent, as exemplified by commonplace comments such as “give us the money; we know what to do” or “you can’t measure our performance because we have special missions.” In the process of overlooking the meaning of interdependence, museums have created their own marginalization.

It is time to forge an ecology of museums that recognizes that a broad web of societal relationships is the bedrock of successful adaptation in a complex, and increasingly severe, world. The lack of interdependent relationships among most museums is an increasing liability, and being valued for ancillary educational offerings and leisure entertainment is no longer sufficient to ensure a future for museums.

**Deep Structural Problems**

These leadership and management deficiencies are caused by numerous deep-seated, structural problems that are preventing museums from rethinking their role and responsibilities and realizing their true potential. These challenges are not inevitable or enduring, however, and there are abundant resources both within and outside the museum sector to assist in determining what can be done. What follows is a brief guide to some of the most harmful of the structural problems, along with comments on how to eradicate them.

**1. Rethink the conventional vision, mission, and values** - Museums are preoccupied with the “what” and the “how”. Few, if any, ever ask “Why are we doing what we are doing?” Asking “why” inevitably leads to questions about purpose, meaning, and values. There are four agendas in the museums world – why, what, how and for whom.

**2. Ask and answer the big questions** as part of examining the vision, mission, and values:

- What changes are you trying to effect?
- What solutions will you generate,
- What are your non-negotiable values?

**3. Reform governance to reflect the community** - One’s cultural background and life experience, are just as important as one’s title or formal position. Museums need deep civic roots to thrive, and local relationships are the soil in which these roots grow. (Vandeventer 2011). Governing authorities must reflect this diversity. In the absence of a board of directors, create an advisory group to grow civic roots.

**4. Experiment with new leadership models** - Museums and galleries are dominated by an outdated corporate model – the lone CEO. Other models must now be considered, such as the Roman model – primus inter pares or first among equals. It is based on collective leadership, a necessity in this profoundly complex world (Janes 1997: 89).

**5. Create new organizational designs** - Although rarely discussed, how you work directly affects what you do. There is an urgent need to abandon hierarchy and replace it with new organizational designs, based on self-organization and authentic personal agency.

**6. Foster personal agency and end the exploitation of museum workers** - Personal agency refers to the capacity of staff to take action in the world, irrespective of their positions. The relationship between workplace and personhood remains largely unrecognized, unexplored, and often abusive in museums. I am shocked to note that thousands of U.S. museums, zoos, and aquariums received US\$1.61 billion in forgivable loans through the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) during the Covid pandemic. The report found that 228 of the nation’s biggest cultural institutions shared US\$771.4 million in PPP loans, but collectively cut 14,400 jobs during the pandemic. Many of those same institutions ended with budget surpluses in 2020, including 67% of art and history museums (AFSCME Cultural Workers United 2021; Thistle 2021).

**7. Install an advocacy policy** – This policy will underpin a socially responsible vision and mission, by delineating what issues are important and how the museum or gallery will respond when confronted with moral and civic challenges, such as the climate crisis.

**8. Accept that museums and galleries have ethical obligations** - Including being open to influence and impact from outside interests and being responsive to citizens’ interests and concerns.

**9. Rethink collections** - Museum and gallery collections are the seed banks of humankind’s successes and failures, and are akin to biological seed banks. One immediate challenge is to assess museum collections to determine what is essential to save (and learn from) in advance of a low energy future and the cessation of unlimited economic growth.

**10. Scrap the edifice complex** - Stop building new museums and galleries, most notably those that aspire to vanity architecture. There are more than 55,000 in the world. A new building will not create meaning and relevance - mostly distractions, budgetary deficits, and large greenhouse gas emissions from concrete and steel.

**12. Discard the myth that museums and galleries are neutral voices of authority.** They are not neutral and never have been (Janes 2009: 59 - 61).

**Conclusions**

The question is no longer if museums can retain their historical privilege of authoritative neutrality, but whether they will concede that society and its institutions have now entered a dangerous time. I submit that a competent museum can, and must, provide their communities with the means of intellectual self-defense against the corrosive dominance of corporations, government complicity, and the consequences of the consumer society. Museums have the opportunity and obligation to both resist the status quo and question the way in which society is governed. Museums will succeed to the extent that they are self-critical and contribute their knowledge and resources to the action required to address the enormous crisis we face. All those engaged in the museum enterprise, be they scholars, students, practitioners, or consultants, are essential to this task.

There are no barriers to social responsibility and there is no one way for museums to achieve this. The museum world is wonderfully diverse, and approaches and solutions will, of necessity, be localized. The museum sector’s preoccupation with money, collections, increasing audiences, and trivial consumption, however, has no future. Museums may choose to persist with these outmoded practices, or invest in renewal. In either instance, it is clear that all museums have now arrived at the metaphorical watershed discussed by Peter Drucker (1994: 1-8). This is the point in history “when society rearranges itself – its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions.” Are museums to be active participants as these events unfold, or victims of their own myopia?

Individual museums can no longer delay in combating the intensification of climate chaos. Only a handful of the world’s museum association have declared a climate emergency and even fewer have followed through with a full program of mitigative and adaptive measures to assist their members. I will leave the last words to social critic, James Kunstler (2007: 1), with the hope that it will strengthen our collective resolve to create a new future for museums:

Hope is not a consumer product. You have to generate your own hope. You do that by demonstrating to yourself that you are brave enough to face reality and competent enough to deal with the circumstances that it presents. How we will manage to uphold a decent society in the face of extraordinary change will depend on our creativity, our generosity, and our kindness ...



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# Ways of Seeing Climate Change

*Collections development practices for and from anticipated futures*

DR SANDRO DEBONO

Hello! I come from the central Mediterranean island of Malta, a few kilometers south of the Italian peninsula, strategically located at the center of the Mediterranean Sea with a history connecting its Northern and Southern shores. Malta is, to this effect, politically European but culturally Mediterranean. Much the same as Alaska, this too is strategically liminal territory. Much like Alaska, this archipelago also get cropped and pasted closer to the much bigger island of Sicily, just to fit into the subjective picture that the politics of geography oftentimes requires. Malta is South for Europe as much as it the North for Africa.

The island is home to an ancient civilization dating as far back as 5,000 B.C. the remains and evidence of which still mark the islands’ cultural landscape. I choose to discuss what are generally described as cart ruts. These consistently binary, parallel cuts in the soft rocky island landscape resemble railway tracks that are typically the width of a small vehicle or cart.

The use and purpose of these cart ruts is the subject of speculative thought. What could these have been? What would their purpose and function be? We do know that these might belong to a lost prehistoric civilization of which the temples are the most noteworthy evidence but even scholars are divided on dating, let alone purpose and function. There are no written sources to go by, no images to consult. Not even myth and oral tradition can come to the rescue. Malta’s cart ruts are shrouded in mystery, the more when considering that some lead directly into the sea, and continue for long stretches underwater. I choose to quote what the English

gentleman E.G. Fenton saw and subsequently took note of in May 1918

*“One day down at Marsa Sirocco I noticed a pair of ruts running out into the sea, and I could trace them some distance under the water. This points to some antiquity, as a subsidence of this portion of the island that must have occurred since they were formed... It is consequently possible that as fluctuation of climate in former times was the rule, that the Neolithic civilization was brought to a close by a period of dessication ...’*

May I be allowed to make my educated guess too? I’m sure you would consent to my educated guess at this point, knowing too well that cat puts are beyond my expertise. Could it be the evidence of climate change that we’re now looking at centuries later? Does this mean that the islands were bigger and sea level rise took over land, perhaps also leading to unexpected disruptions?

## A question of the Availability Heuristic

It is certainly the case that what could or might have happened as far back as 7,000 years ago is beyond living memory. Indeed, what is under discussion here is an extreme case of what we generally describe as availability heuristic —if some-thing cannot be recalled, then it is far less important that that which can be. Humans tend to weigh their judgments heavily towards more recent knowledge, sharing informed opinions on the latest and known rather than the remote and more often than not unknown. In other words, the easier it is to recall the consequences of something, the greater those consequences are often perceived to be.

The availability heuristic idea also ushers in a starker distinction that might have been missed so far - the short term and the long term in thought processes have a marked impact on how we understand and relate to the world around us. In other words, availability heuristic can be understood as short-termism that generally guides our judgment, our conversations and our lives. The challenges that the cart ruts incisively marking my place of origin stand for are certainly not short-term but belong instead to the long-termism of existence. Climate change definitely be-longs to the long-term and the solutions we’re in search for may also have to be thought out through the lens of long-termism where time is relative, and the present is but a granular moment of existence that we majestically seek to immortalize.

## But in the long-term, what is time?

Long-termism is beyond our notion of time and the way we have come to measure its passing in mechanical ways. The ways and means we measure time mechanically is a recent development in the long-termism of human history. It is but one form out of many more including measure yardsticks informed by the rhythms of nature be they menstrual cycles or astrology, including the movements of planets, sun and moon. Augustine of Hippo, who lived in today’s Algeria (North Africa, Mediterranean Sea) at the beginning of the 4th century mentions three forms of time that I choose to focus on in this short contribution —a times present of things past, a time present of things present and a time present of things future. He also goes further

*“For these three do coexist somehow in the soul, for otherwise I could not see them. The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation.”*

The point from which St Augustine defines time is the present - be it past, present or future.

## But where do museums stand in all this?

Museums are primarily and unequivocally concerned, more often than not with mechanical time measured from the present. They are set to open and close on a time schedule, setting off alarms if things go beyond preset times. Their out-reach program is set in time, programmed in ‘time present of things future’ and more often than not collecting in ‘time present of things past’ in response to their perspective of the past from the present and, in order to go beyond, they struggle to recall through research that which is unknown or beyond memory, oftentimes frenetically shifting through metaphorical piles of material culture to acquire a better understanding of what, could have or might have happened. All is performed from the present, nothing but the present. Museum publics respond to the present in more than one way. They certainly seek to experience both present and from the present thanks to the knowledge that can help them understand the long-termism of existence from the short-termism of their lifetime.

We can take the ways and means how museums, but not just, interpret art-works in their search for a better understanding of climate change as a point of departure. Ever since John Berger’s Ways of Seeing (1972) shifted attention from the market value to the social and political significance of the artwork, ushering in new perspectives for the better understanding of the political systems within which art is conceived, the specific artwork took on the vestiges of a repository of information. Indeed, we can perhaps consider that the potential use of works of art as a resource to understand climate change stems from Berger’s shift. The examples that come to mind can be neatly bracket between the interpretative and the search for the empirical. Whilst the first is within the museum’s comfort zone, the second is the realm of science.

We can take the case of the extensive repertoire of the Hudson River School painter Albert Bierstsdadt whose works are, more often than not, theatrical and psychologically emotive. Some have also been described as stereographically constructed informed by his search for the ideal rather than the factual representation of his choice of cultural and natural landscape. Indeed, Bierstadt’s choice may have been in response to the burgeoning tourism industry and the anticipated market for popularized views of his times. Reactions to his works, including contemporary works of art in dialogue with Bierstadt’s paintings, may thus unknowingly be a statement in response to the ideal and the fabricated. We may also cite the work of Frederic Edwin Church, particularly those inspired by the Canadian coast of Newfoundland. Church had chartered a schooner to explore the region before returning to his

New York studio with a substantial amount of sketches prepared as memory guide to consult when completing his work. His paintings would be akin to a syn-thesis from memory, including both visual and documented.

At the other end of the spectrum we can mention the work of Swiss eighteenth century painter Caspar Wolf. His depiction of the Lower Grindelwald Glacier with Lütschine and the Mettenberg ticks the right boxes in response to the scientific and the empirical. These include knowledge of the date when the artist painted his work, the consistent rendering of the glacier and its surroundings with physical reality and knowledge of the precise location of the artist when painting his work. The works of Canaletto and Bellotto, oftentimes recognized as having been painted with the help of a camera obscura, would also tick the right boxes from the list of empirical requirements. The works of both artists can provide factual and reliable information as to the rising level of the waters in the canals of Northern Italian city of Venice.

In all four cases, the relevance and significance of the works of art chosen, be they interpretative, and by consequence, idealized or recognized instead as holding empirical evidence, is nevertheless seen through the lens of the present. It is the same present that Augustine of Hippo defines in space and time, which is also the lens through which art is being used to reconstruct the past. We seek to catch up on our past on the basis of memory and history, putting in greater effort when history cannot be mined and scripted from documents and other evidence. The greater the scarcity of resources, the greater the lack of knowledge and by consequence the greater the risk of availability heuristic of museum publics.

There is nothing stopping museums from shifting points of view from the present to the future. By dislocating present from presence, by rethinking the relation-ship between viewpoint and space and by shifting the angle beyond anything guided by existence, museums can shift their thinking to address the ambitions of long-termism. For climate change action, this may be the decisive turning point and the questions guiding collections development practices would be entirely different. What if our collections development practices had to be guided by the view from the future, keeping the seven generation principle in mind, rather than going by Augustine’s present-centric thinking? Should we envisage what the next seven generations from now would need if we had to shift our point of view into their present and look back to what we’re missing out on our present? What if we had to anticipate their needs and ambitions by standing with them in our future rather than decide what they need from the present anticipating their possible futures?

This thinking has been recently proposed in a book by Rupert Read “Parents for a future - Creating a world we’re proud to bequeath to future generations” presented in late March 2021, coincidentally a couple of weeks after my participation in the Anchorage Museum conference. Read describes his method as “a way into thinking like a future person.” Quoting Read

“*The real point is not what you come up with from that perspective. The real point is to make the effort to attain such a drastically different perspective ... seek to take up the point of view of a distant descendant, someone born after you have died, someone you’ll never know. ... You are speaking back from the future to now. What do the people alive now need to know about what you need? How can you best and most honestly reach them?*”

With this shift in point of view, and as we take long-termism as the measure and yardstick of our viewpoint, preserving a wider context rather than the artwork itself would be crucial for a better understanding of what knowledge our futures would need. Going by Berger’s Ways of seeing, Bierstadt’s or Church’s works, to mention two from the examples I previously cited in this piece, could stand for evidence of climate change by contextualizing them in the stark reality of the developments happening back then. Back then American Scientist and woman rights campaigner Eunice Newton Foote wrote her paper ‘Circumstances affecting the heat of the sun’s rays’ making the connection between carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and climate change. Newton Foote had clearly stated that an atmosphere of that gas would give the earth a high temperature. That was 1856.’

The thoughts of British art critic John Ruskin also come metaphorically into the picture. Musings about the ‘plague wind’ advanced in the two lectures he delivered at the London

Institution on 4 and 11 February 1884 denounced the effect of industrialization on the physical and spiritual climate of the modern world. His lectures date to 1884. Ruskin states

“*It looks partly as if it were made of poisonous smoke; very possibly it may be: there are at least two hundred furnace chimneys in a square of two miles on every side of me.*”

Much as researchers strive to piece together the evidence of a past that is oftentimes caught in between the folds of the museum public’s availability heuristic, so would our view, if we had to position ourselves into the future, help us piece together the needs of our distant descendants obliging to the needs and challenges flagged by us from the future. We might need to rethink collections development practices in new ways, perhaps. Broadening the context of historic collections, also with the complementary addition of what is generally considered as meta-data, may be a possible way forward although this might not be a yardstick to apply across the board. Indeed, it may be easier to transform this thinking into tangible action when museums go for commissioned work within the remit of their collections development strategies.

A good example of how this thinking might take tangible form and shape within collections development thinking is the Future Library project also known as "Framtidsbiblioteket". This public artwork informed by long-termism is the brainchild of Scottish artist Katie Paterson, commissioned as part of the city of Oslo’s public art program. The project will unfold over the next 100 years. Every year, between 2014 and 2144, an author will be commissioned to contribute a text to a growing collection of unpublished, unread manuscripts held in trust for future generations in a specially designed room in the Deichmanske Public Library in Bjørvika until their publication in 2114. By that date, 1000 spruce saplings

planted in Nordmarka, a forest just outside Oslo, will provide the raw material for these manuscripts to be printed in what is, perhaps, a good example of cathedral thinking which is about a far-reaching vision, a well thought-out blueprint, and a shared commitment to long-term implementation.

This possibility might jar with the very idea of accessibility that is core to museum practice. There would certainly be the need to articulate this thinking further given that accessibility would not just concern the delicate balance between state of conservation and enjoyment by current and future generations. With this frame of mind, accessibility would become the paradox of an availability heuristic, knowing too well that if something cannot be recalled, then it is far less important that that which can be. Long-termism might have to inform new forms of access, which might bridge access to future anticipation from the present with access to the present from an anticipated future. Can a collection be seen in the future from the present as much as we aspire to see present collections from the future? Technology might have some of the answers, possibly not all. Perhaps.

In the meantime, on the Mediterranean island that I still call home, archaeologists continue to search for the missing links that would perhaps, one day, explain what really happened when the cart-ruts marking the island’s landscape went underwater.

E. G. Fenton, ‘The Maltese Cart Ruts’ in *Man*, 18, 1918, 67 - 72.

John Ruskin, *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, Two Lectures

Delivered at the London Institute, February 4th and February 11th 1884, 1st Ed., Outlook Ver-lag GmbH, 2018, 27.

St Augustine: Confessions (Book XI) - <http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/AugustineBookXI.htm>

Future Library project - <https://www.futurelibrary.no>

Rupert Read’s “Parents for a future - Creating a world we’re proud to bequeath to future generations” - <https://accidentalgoods.life/parents-for-a-future/>

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# Climate of Change

JULIE DECKER

It was roughly thirty years ago that headlines suggested that heat-trapping emissions from burning fossil fuels and rainforests were potentially disruptive to the planet. Earlier, it was thought that warming might be a boon. In 1896, Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius proposed that a warming globe might simply offer an agricultural bonus and a milder climate in Northern regions (Revkin 2018). All would be pleasant. But by 1956, *The New York Times* dared to suggest harm, proposing that accumulating greenhouse gas emissions from energy production would lead to long-lasting and potentially destructive environmental changes (Kaempffert 1956, 191).

In 2006, the cover of *TIME Magazine* read, ‘Global Warming: Be Worried. Be Very Worried.’ But the warnings didn’t stick. More catastrophic headlines followed, but behavioral change by the public and effective political leadership on the issue did not stick, either. Years later, the July 20/July 27, 2020 issue of *TIME Magazine* continued to beep the horn, this headline reading, ‘One Last Chance: The Defining Year for the Planet,’ promising perspectives from the Dalai Lama, Greta Thunberg, Vanessa Nakate, Oliver Jeffers, Stacey Abrams, and Angelina Jolie. It could just as easily have read, ‘This time, we really, really mean it.’

**Part of what has been missing from leadership on the evolving climate emergency is our museums. Continually ranked as more trusted institutions than government, museums have been slow to grasp and champion change. Museums began to be less neutral on climate only in the last decade, with recognition that we are no longer anticipating the epoch once declared the future apocalypse: we are living in it.**

Ancient methane deposits are being released from melting permafrost; anthrax spores are being released from thawing reindeer corpses. The long arc of geological time – deep time – is contrasted with the unprecedented pace of the climate change crisis. In *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*, Robert MacFarlane writes, ‘Things [geography] endures, outlive us. Deep time is measured in units that humble the human instant: epochs and eons, instead of minutes and years ... We stand with our toes, as well as our heels, on a brink’ (2019, 121). MacFarlane proposes deep time as a radical perspective to provoke us to action beyond apathy.

Our future looks far different than our yesterday. Climate change, paired with a raging pandemic, reinforce that we must prepare and respond. Museums offer trusted information and present lessons from the past and can also help us to navigate the present and play the pivotal role of posing questions about the future, encouraging the vision and imagination needed for tomorrow. Museums help people find meaning – it is the core of service and their essential value. Museums can be part of a shift in thinking and action, able to prompt and provide narratives that define the now and the next.

To do this, museums must find new ways of telling the story of our locals, our places, and people. As the world faces the unprecedented, human lifeways and ecosystems will be changed. Rather than distinct challenges, close connections exist between climate change, justice, and the pandemic. Climate change is a slow-motion public health emergency, exacerbated by health crises associated with sudden events, such as extreme weather and wildfire, and the environment is one of the factors that affect our health and wellbeing. Museums need to be key narrators, offering stories and perspectives of place and people, engaging the public around ideas affecting our changing landscapes (natural, political, and cultural), and creating and highlighting radical new forms of research, practice, and placemaking.

Museums can gather a rich community of thinkers, creative practitioners, and changemakers to focus on vision, problem solving, and positive change, moving beyond symbolic and into transformative. Climate change poses a compelling scenario for audiences – a worldwide experiment with survival. In a time of urgent and widespread activism, across everything from professional sports to social media, museums need to be current and relevant to their audiences. Finding something to say about critical, contemporary issues can be hard work, but alternatives are weak. Audiences will no longer let museums off the hook, whether on racial justice, climate justice or many other social, political, and cultural issues. The boldest work is not in the reaction; it’s in a long-term, deeply embedded, and informed response. True responses to climate change can prompt museums to think differently about core concepts of care, conservation, and stewardship, and to push forward alternative forms of collecting, preservation, and interpretation. Museums can also help push forward policymaking and shape future ecological legacies.

Moving the conversation beyond an acknowledgment of climate change, and beyond the simpler narratives of green buildings and sustainability, means building museums’ capacity to promote awareness, mitigation, and resilience in the face of climate change. Museums can spur transformative action by working across disciplines and across agendas and helping to break down the silos between knowledge bearers, in rethinking the structures that maintain the status quo, and in seeing connections between environmental change and melting ice and gender, racism, xenophobia, and consumerism. The London Natural History Museum declared a planetary emergency. Others have created calls to action and design challenges. Many have worked to support youth involvement in climate action. Co-creation with artists, youth and communities and climate action organizations brings museums out of isolation and out of theory into a more impactful level of response.

Climate change unquestionably changes how people live – everywhere. It is in our North and South, in our coastlines and in our plains, in our urban and in our rural. There is no longer a museum audience in the world that isn’t affected. Museums can not only help people understand the forces shaping the world today, but they can also help people envision what the world will be like if those forces operate unchecked or if they are altered and evolve in different ways based on our current actions and response. This begins from a place of where traditional structures and narratives are disrupted. Museums are distinctly positioned to highlight local conditions and the impact of climate change on local populations, particularly people of color.

For Indigenous communities, human relationship with the land is not episodic; it is continuous, expanding across millennia, and reciprocal – one of the few examples of a successful relationship with humankind and the natural world. This creates fundamental and irreplaceable knowledge. Western ideas and have long been imported and our belief in the new has discarded critical knowledge. ‘Peripheries’ have become centers for the climate crisis and thus is born a method of decolonization, empowering the voices of Indigenous communities, acknowledging language and the land, and affecting traditional definitions of creativity, research, scholarship and knowledge. These perceived peripheries embody histories, highlight spiritual and environmental wisdom, serve as boundary markers between home and outsiders, convey information and senses of local topography and memory, embrace natural and social connections, link present to past, and outline a much more nuanced and dynamic understanding of place.

But the specter of climate change has also led to a new colonization of the perceived

peripheries at the same time – as places to study, romanticize and depict – with tourism of many kinds, from scholarship to science, to art, and to the practice of museums. The Arctic, for instance, has become a trendy place. Museums are not excluded from the trend, many participating in a race to have an exhibition about climate change and the Arctic.

Outsiders from urban centers look out to the edges and draw conclusions for export: outsiders as voyeurs, experts of places not visited or lived, and knowledge extracted. The outsider view as the authoritative voice over the insider view is centuries old in Indigenous places, such as the Arctic. The Arctic vernacular is not perceived as holding the knowledge; instead, the knowledge is somehow applied from the outside. As museums at traditional urban and economic centers talk about climate change, they need to recognize the centers of lived experience as important knowledge centers of climate change. The most impactful museum exhibitions may come from these complex understandings, not from simple declarations.

In her 2019 Nobel Lecture, writer Olga Tokarczyk offered:

*Today our problem lies — it seems — in the fact that we do not yet have ready narratives not only for the future, but even for a concrete now, for the ultra-rapid transformations of today’s world. We lack the language, we lack the points of view, the metaphors, the myths and new fables. Yet we do see frequent attempts to harness rusty, anachronistic narratives that cannot fit the future to imaginaries of the future, no doubt on the assumption that an old something is better than a new nothing or trying in this way to deal with the limitations of our own horizons. In a word, we lack new ways of telling the story of the world.*

To fulfill their special strength for storytelling, museums need to redefine and expand their definitions of knowledge and credentials for scholarship. Local and Indigenous knowledge encompasses the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and Indigenous peoples, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life. This knowledge is integral to a cultural complexity that also encompasses language, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, ritual, and spirituality. For museums to decolonize, including these ways of knowing is important. Western science is increasingly recognizing the value of Indigenous knowledge, and the characteristics of Indigenous knowledge are

the qualities museums need to be relevant to a changing world: cumulative, dynamic, adaptive, holistic, observant, responsible, relative, interconnected, non-linear, humble, intergenerational, distinct, irreplaceable, moral, valid, and invaluable.

While large museums are seen as the model of success, smaller museums may be at an advantage in a climate crisis. A manageable budget and a nimble mission, with small collections and the potential to reach big audiences is a ship that makes tighter turns. Smaller museums have also managed to redefine expectations in many communities. Museums of the Arctic, from Alaska to Canada to Finland and Norway, for instance, have long been resisting the colonization of urban centers further south. Relevance has meant not talking about abstract painting or Impressionism but documenting the impressions of the people who are bearing witness to an utterly changed Earth and utterly changed lifeways.

What museums can best give voice to are the witnesses of our times, the voices of the people impacted by change and injustice. Museums can also connect and reconnect people to the natural world to better understand concepts of deep time and the climate crisis. This is more difficult, arguably, in urban centers. Many around the world face an unrecognizable form of the environment with the shifting climate paired with rapid globalization, urbanization, land-use issues, speculative trade routes, new migration, and threatened livelihoods. ‘Solastaglia’ is a term mentioned increasingly frequently, to describe the loss of the known relationship with the landscape. Threatened and adaptive landscapes are at the center of an academic, scientific and political ecology.

In partnership with contemporary artists, museums can connect in new ways to landscapes and the natural world, and complexify and contextualize ideas of land and human impact. Creative response helps people understand climate change and envision the future relative to our actions. Artists and designers can imagine and propose solutions for how we might shape the future. The new museum landscape is one in which the natural world is present, not past, and in which the future depends on our ability to reconnect to the forces that shape nature, and the nature that shapes us. A romantic view of nature and landscape – untouched, barely inhabitable – a rugged place for rugged people and pioneers, has dominated ideas of traditional landscape painting and photography. With climate change, nostalgia for wild, remote places has prompted a new kind of frontier and pioneer, a yet-again colonial place that romantically beckons last-chance tourists. The task then becomes to offer deeper narratives that recognize deeper forms of knowledge.

Our nature, our landscapes, are politicized, even as we face daunting challenges, from post-oil economies to immigration and equity, forest fires, and food security. The depicted landscapes of today are not the Romantic views of artists like Thomas Hill, but a different kind of nostalgia and longing – for the landscape of our past. The familiar portrayal of the natural world is made up of Western images, a simplification of forms and colors and lifeways. Indigenous cultures have long been marginalized, including in the imagery of place, left out of the depictions, and substituted with an uninhabited and uninhabitable, both pure and dangerous. Art has been filtered, governed – the outsider, Western and white, view more dominant.

The natural world we inhabit and affect needs solutions. In his *Arctic Dreams*, Barry Lopez wrote: *Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience; to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder upon it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of the moon and the colors of the dawn and dusk.* (1986, 45). To understand the natural world, we can re-complexify it, move away from the simplicity, the black-and-white and the only-Western ways of knowing. Museums have the skills to make meaning.

The landscape is best understood through a narrative of renewed nostalgia and now-manufactured landscapes, contrasted, and intertwined with a continuum of Indigenous knowledge and new visions for human lifeways in an inevitably changed world. Today’s landscape is contemporary and global; close rather than remote, no longer segregated from the politics of anticipation. Humans have been the most powerful geomorphological force on Earth for the last 1000 years. Only through radical creative response will we adapt to what lies ahead. This is the landscape for museums.

One of the early museum exhibitions on climate change was at the American Museum of Natural History in 2008/2009. *Climate Change: The Threat to Life and A New Energy Future* approached climate change through ecology and oil. Since that time, we have come to appreciate that the impacts of humans on climate change and climate change on humans is a complex narrative that cannot be told in the isolation of disciplines.

Museums must address diverse communities and impacts, even polices, to help shape a society that truly fosters sustainable, cooperative, regenerative practices that uphold the rights and lifts the lives of all people.

The issues of our time are forcing an assessment of the strategic value of museums and prompting essential work to prioritize, message, plan, respond, and create. It has not been an easy task to navigate our evolving role in creating a deeply diverse public mirror for the community. Perhaps ‘no waste’ is a new core principle going forward – do not waste energy, do not waste relationships, do not waste knowledge. We must diversify content and programs to create a new canon, to share and decenter knowledge and knowledge production, to create alternatives and to magnify voices.

For museums working on such critical and systemic issues as climate change, co- creation is essential and iterative and not a passive process. It requires an activated, participating community and an activated, participating museum. This goes beyond the common museum practice of allowing visitors to comment with Post-It notes. It goes beyond episodic relationships and events. With co-creation, artists, participating communities, other organizations across sectors and disciplines, and groups of people come together regularly, dedicated to creating together, whether around a cause, a shared interest, a shared objective, or shared values. Community engagement, the rooted and authentic kind, can push against sentiment and show the resiliency of cultures and the knowledge they hold that remains key to our futures as Earth’s geographical, climatic, political, and cultural landscapes are transformed. The same way that decolonization requires radical rethinking and invention, so does climate change. Messages of catastrophe have failed. We must find new and creative approaches to telling stories, histories, and causalities and inspire new methodology.

Museums often have a narrow concept of value. Metrics have long measured money and transactional relationships with audiences (admissions, memberships, events, programmatic attendance). But today we must question the relevance of those metrics.

A museum’s brand is now deeply rooted not in its transactions but in its ability to reach communities and to be of value. With climate change, the pandemic and other social, political, and environmental changes, museums can be more like first responders – agile, nimble, responding in real time to the world around them and finding valued relevance along the way. Museums can operate outside of closed systems and consider social, political, educational, creative, and other types of value beyond the financial and easily measurable.

We may need to believe that, with vision and values as a driver, audiences (and funds) will follow. But it takes time and trust. Change has become an imperative, however; communities crave thoughtful and meaningful leadership and activists have become more and more vocal about what they demand from their institutions. What once were considered museum assets are now, at times, museum burdens: temple architecture, extensive collections, influential donors, real estate. We are only at the beginning of rethinking as we reach the stage of understanding, that we must ask ourselves hard questions – not just about society, but about our being, our value. Conversations about material culture are shifting our view of the significance of collections and we are moving from tangible to intangible – from protecting objects to protecting narratives and perspectives. Objects are about oral histories and rituals and stories and traditional knowledge. Museums in many locals are collaborating with source communities in attempts to decolonize and facilitate community agendas. If we banish the word ‘museum’ from our title for a moment, it’s worth imagining what kind of institution we might be. Without the centuries-old practices of collecting and preserving pasts, perhaps we could see ourselves more as learning institutions, more malleable to providing a new kind of value and more inviting of ideas across all forms of knowledge and experience.

Museums are complex cultural institutions that have been shaped by a range of forces and influences and are powerful constructs with strong visualizations of identity. While climate change and climate justice are inspiring community activism, museums tend to be averse to an activist role. But to be part of change, or better, to be changemakers, museums learn some comfort with activism – from the way we define our jobs, to how we write our texts, to the way we collect, to how we work with communities. This does not mean embracing antagonism: true activism can inspire rather than simply provoke. By positioning ourselves as learning institutions and learning communities, museums can move away from the authoritative and the impulse to self-validate. Rediscovering our value is no longer a theoretical discussion. The imperatives of recessions, pandemics, migration, and climate change are reshaping what is valued and what is demanded of society’s institutions. Survival for all of us, including museums, lies in our ability to adapt, overcome, invent, and dwell in the certainty of uncertainty. Climate change forces us to see, to experience, to comprehend, and to act. In action, we find courage, which is key to our collective future; passivity is now an impossible way forward. The world will change around us regardless; its whether we want to be part of it. Without change, the risk is too great.

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# The Anthropocene Isn't Just for Scientists

## *The Potential for Humanities Resources to Document Climate Change*

SARAH SUTTON

Everywhere people are confronted by climate change. They encounter it in their neighborhoods, in the media, and in the weather reports. Most often climate change is presented as a scientific phenomenon, but it is not only for scientists; and it is not just about science.

Climate change is an anthropogenic phenomenon, a change caused by humans, but the humanists are not the people who are researching or reporting on climate change. They could be, though. To successfully engage the public to take climate action, museums must help people see themselves as part of the climate change experience. Museums, as charitable, educational, community-focused institutions, are taking action on climate by reducing energy, making new choices about products and activities, and providing important public programing. But most museums are overlooking their greatest assets: their research abilities and collections. For the public who are not interested in science, or see climate science as someone else's responsibility, the humanities and the rich resources of our collections and communities must become part of the climate change conversation.

There is an opportunity to blend museum collections to illustrate climate change in ways that enrich the science. Our collections contain proxy data for corroborating climate change science and for telling climate change stories.

The climate was here before humans' instruments could measure it. To document the climate from *before* widespread instrumentation, researchers try to understand the changes over time in weather and atmosphere. Climatologists use the ancient geological record for deep-time understanding. The evidence of change in these "natural archives" is proxy data for changes in the Earth influenced by climate. Historical climatologists use reconstructions of weather and climate from the historic (not pre-historic) period before national weather programs. These are "anthropogenic archives," information from human observation or actions. The data are in ships logbooks, farmers' records, a time series of photographs, etc. (Pfister et al, 2001). The ancient geological record's natural archives, and the anthropogenic data are all proxy data: they represent a phenomenon when the phenomenon itself cannot be measured. This historical period is valuable for illustrating that people have changed the climate, that this is not a natural geological phenomenon.

Humanities climate proxies can corroborate scientific data and can illustrate the impacts of climate change in ways quite different from scientific proxies or mathematical models. *The Climate Change Photography Resource Guide* at the Anchorage Museum's Atwood Resource Center is an excellent example. Claire Berman, the William E. Davis Intern at the Museum in 2018, began a guide to photographic materials in the Stock Series from the Ward Wells Collection "to highlight aspects of Alaska that are transforming due to climate change." The images were captured between 1948 and 1981. The guide notes changes to Alaska Native culture, ecosystems, ice, infrastructure, plant life, weather, and wildlife. Wells photographed many glaciers, and "These photos can be compared to current images of glaciers to show glacial changes over time." An observer can see how two images, taken from the same vantage point decades apart, clearly illustrate glacial retreat in the ways percent ice coverage or a table of measurements cannot. Artistic renderings and photographs repeat this story around the World. (J.J. Zumbuhl, S.U. Nussbaumer, 2018).

Museums' collections are treasure troves of this data. Sailors' logbooks record weather patterns, wind direction and force, and ship speeds that can be aligned with historical climate records. The bloom times of cherry trees in Tokyo and Washington, DC. have changed because warmer conditions trigger earlier blooms. The 900+-year record in Tokyo shows that these sacred trees bloom earlier now than ever before (Primack, et al, 2009). Your site,

like Monticello, may have planting records from a century or more ago that will indicate what species thrived there, and when flowers bloomed or vegetables could be safely planted. Are the conditions the same today?

An historical climatologist is very carefully when using data like this, finding ways to verify its accuracy and appropriateness for climate calculations. For humanities resources such as commentary by amateur weather observers, or written or numerical record of events, researchers use calibration-verification and indexing to compare changes over time. These methodologies are proven, peer-reviewed approaches, but they are not yet used widely. And any researcher must also develop the skills and experience to distinguish "noise" in the data, those outside influences that interfere with and possibly confuse the data. The historical climatologists also lack access to varied data for this work. The majority of published research used resources publicly-available digitized materials, usually from governments. This is where museums have an opportunity to contribute to climate change research and conversations.

The Anchorage Museum's 2018 resource guide is unusual. Few museums have climate guides for their collections, or any tools for identifying climate-change related materials. This must change. To create help museum professionals embrace this research and the public engagement opportunities it offers, we must first train collections professionals to recognize and understand climate-related resources; identify more questions to ask our collections about climate; establish keyword and finding aid language to reflect new concerns and understanding without being so distinctive as to be unsearchable; and tag and annotate materials in our collections to improve research access. Then we must create partnerships with climate researchers. Our job is to know our collections; their job is to understand environment and climate.

Together we tell better, bigger stories. The ocean researcher can explain climate changes in fish stocks based on species range and frequency; you can tell the story based on fishery records in port, or three generations of fisher folk records. The climatologist can illustrate how species in flower and vegetable gardens are changing, and your collection and audience will likely have their own data to share. The climatologist can compare data to your records of community bets on when the ice breaks up on the lake, or when the fishing derby can start, and tell a climate story that anyone in your community can connect to.

With the scientists we can interpret the climate change signals in our collections, and use those discoveries to engage the public in meaning-making whether they consider themselves scientists or humanists.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Sutton, LEED-AP, is principal of Sustainable Museums, Sector Lead for Cultural Institutions for We Are Still In, and a member of the American Alliance of Museums Professional Network on Environment and Climate.

# Landscapes of Change

DIANE DRUBAY

We are on a global journey towards a better understanding and more profound respect for our planet. Museums take a pivotal role in this process by acting as positive agents within social ecology and deploying sustainable operational models. Designed with respect to the local needs and specificities, 'Museums Facing Extinction' is a multi-year program to turn museums into agents of change by starting a series of climate actions nudging for systemic change. Launched in November 2019 at the Futurium in Berlin, it combines the expertise of EIT Climate-KIC with the international community of We Are Museums to construct a blueprint for a better future.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Diane Dubray is founder of the international collective We Are Museums as well as Buzzeum, a communication and digital strategy agency for museums and cultural institutions

**A MULTI-YEAR PROGRAM TO NUDGE SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

The transformation process unfolds into 5 steps, duplicable over time depending on the conditions. The first step researches the current state of the ecosystem and harvests content and knowledge. A four day workshop was organized gathering thought leaders and experts from various disciplines such a museum transformation, place-making, systems thinking, biomimicry, architecture, climate activism, natural history science, and social justice.

Handbooks, event frameworks, roadmaps and e-learning content were created from this event in order to cross-pollinate the museum sector with valuable and forward-thinking ideas and best practices. These resources were also used by museums to create their own event, raise awareness on the climate emergency and start their ecological transition.

The main stage of our transformation process lies in the prototyping of climate actions with museums. A seven month program has been run with 16 museum professionals leading to four projects nudging climate actions and systemic change. Then, a necessary sensemaking phase was organized to reflect on what happened, identify the levers for change and understand the main blockers. This workshop also gives the right tools to participants to become beacons of change and amplify the program. Currently being planned, the last stage focuses on replicating the climate actions produced previously.

**FROM DEEP-LISTENING TO 4 PROJECTS NUDGING CLIMATE ACTIONS.**

To run our experimentation phase, We Are Museums, EIT Climate-KIC, Exaptive and MO Museum in Vilnius joined forces. Our goal was to foster micro behavioral changes at a local scale and create a movement of emerging models and practices that could tackle systemic challenges.

From November 2020 to May 2021, 16 museum professionals from Lithuania followed an intense program offering a large variety of training, 1:1 mentoring sessions, peer-to-peer support and resources on climate action, systems thinking, futures literacy, biomimicry, and more. The heart of our program was 20 sessions of facilitated innovation where deep-listening sessions helped us identified potential triggers for collective innovation. Four systemic challenges have been unpacked from leading to 4 climate actions nudging for lasting change at a systemic level.

**Overcoming competition by fostering museum commoning**

One of the teams bring a solution to counter the highly competitive spirit among the museum sector in Lithuania. They opened an online space on Facebook called ‘Muziejai prieš klimato kaitą’ (Museums against climate change) in order to create and ensure conducive for collaboration and commoning in Lithuania. Museum professionals discuss the ecological transition of museums but also ask for unused exhibition materials from their museum colleagues. This project is a great example of creating what we call "bridging capital" (after Putnam theory). It created the necessary resources and foundations to foster conditions for change. It also created a strong "bonding capital" by setting up a national online network about climate change in the museum field in Lithuania.

**Nudging climate engagement through education**

The second team highlighted the difference between participation and engagement as key to turning visitors into ambassadors of climate action. The group wished to create ripples of change through Lithuania by organizing a series of Nature-focused events covering four regions of Lithuania, in Kaunas, Biržai, Telšiai and Vilnius. A series of exhibitions, screenings, discussions and workshops were organized. The films helped raise awareness on the hidden potential of nature as a source of healing and medicine, but also about the wildlife of old forests in Lithuania. The workshops showed quilts and jeans as recycling materials for creativity.

**Towards green team in Lithuanian museums**

The third team identified worked on a way to engage museum teams in climate actions. They provided a common language and resource for museums to start their ecological transition through a handbook. They organized an online conference about sustainable museum practices to share these guidelines and create more awareness among the sector to trigger museums to act. As a last step, the Directorate of Vilnius Memorial Museums established the Sustainability team and started implementing recommendations from the handbook as well as other educational activities related to environmental issues.

**Towards climate engagement through education**

The last group wanted to bring climate stories to museums through a series of short documentaries called “4K: KLIMATO KAITA KALBA KŪRINIAIS“ (climate change talks through the artworks). Told by scientists, garden botanists, biologists, nature professionals and enthusiasts, the idea is to bring a new layer of knowledge on collections already well-known by the audience.

**SENSEMAKING TO AMPLIFY WHAT HAS BEEN DONE**

The concepts of "loose coupling", "mindfulness", and "sensemaking" have been introduced into organizational studies in the 1970s by Karl E. Weick (American organizational theorist). The methodology is about extracting meaning from a process, sharing insights, creating a space for discussion or reading between the lines to find new insights or non-obvious connections that trigger new actions and innovations.

Our Sensemaking workshop, run in partnership with the Green Dealers Foundation started by a deep-listening session. Notions of time and commitment to change have emerged as well as the need to get triggered by new fields of knowledge such as biomimicry and futures literacy to embrace transformation. The “Iceberg Canva” highlighted the value of community collaborations to unleash unpredictable benefits and as the only way to set up climate-related projects. Other keys factors to achieve a successful transformational process were the feeling of adventure, experimentation and access to novelty, as well as having space for listening and reflecting. All participants realized that to deal with climate emergencies they have to think outside of the box as standard procedures are not sufficient. But also that it is key to put sustainability and climate at the very heart of institutional procedures and goals. And lastly, to a supportive team, an element of mentoring and a non-judging environment are necessary to create a space for experimentation.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "Change is the only constant in life." But even if change is one of the most natural processes, it is also one of the hardest things to do. If we want museums to become agents of change and foster sustainable futures, first we need to understand how people can change and this program is exactly about that. It is before everything a personal journey that we live together for the better good.

# Climate Toolkit:

## A Shared Path to Climate Leadership

ANNIE SHVACH

The climate crisis is one of the biggest challenges facing the world today, and we — the leaders, educators, collection managers, zoologists, horticulturists, and others — can play an essential leadership role in addressing it. Can we leverage the collective action of botanical gardens, museums and zoos worldwide to address these issues on an unprecedented scale? And can we further leverage this action by engaging all our constituents, over 500 million visitors per year, to take action themselves? Transformation isn’t easy, but organizations can help one another. This is where the Climate Toolkit comes in.

The Climate Toolkit ([climatetoolkit.org](http://climatetoolkit.org)) was created as a collaborative opportunity for collections based cultural organizations who want to share information, mentor one another, learn how to aggressively address climate change, and inspire the communities they serve to follow their lead. The Toolkit embraces twenty-nine goals for addressing climate change within the categories of energy, food service, water, transportation, waste, landscapes and horticulture, investments, visitors, and research. To date, the Climate Toolkit is comprised of 32 organizations — including 10 museums — serving more than 34,700,000 annual visitors.

The Toolkit is created with the understanding that every organization is different, every community is different, and every bioregion is different, and each will have to prioritize the areas that are most important to address. This means that sustainability initiatives will be as unique as each institution. Opening a discussion about sustainability initiatives can be helpful to organizations who do not know where to start, need help overcoming challenges, and need more resources about the goal. The Climate Toolkit has released educational interviews about sustainability initiatives, created climate action guides, held interactive webinars, and posted resources under each of our goals. To help continue the discussion of climate action at the Climate Toolkit at each public institution, an advisory committee was created to help review and give feedback to all the informational pieces and guides we create.

The Climate Toolkit encourages not only institutional climate discussion but conversation at every stakeholder level, including guests, board members, donors, and employees. The Climate Toolkit is also working diligently to start conversations about climate change with our youth in the Pittsburgh area; a Youth Climate Advisory Committee comprised of twenty local teenagers has been initiated to create climate dialogue and action as a model for others.

Botanical gardens, zoos and museums are trusted public institutions that have evolved to meet the needs of their specific ecoregions and communities, presenting an opportunity to be leaders in their communities on human and environmental health issues. Collectively, public institutions can have some of the most profound impacts in the world in addressing climate change by getting to the root of the problem, human lifestyles, and working to make lasting change. Each garden, museum, and zoo’s leadership must address the root causes of the unique environmental issues our communities face and do so in a way that can be replicated and amplified to guests. When we do that, not only will we have helped address this and other major symptomatic issues, but we will have set a new path for people to reconnect with nature and change the way they interact with the rest of the world.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ann Svach is Climate Toolkit Coordinator at Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh.

# Looking Ahead:

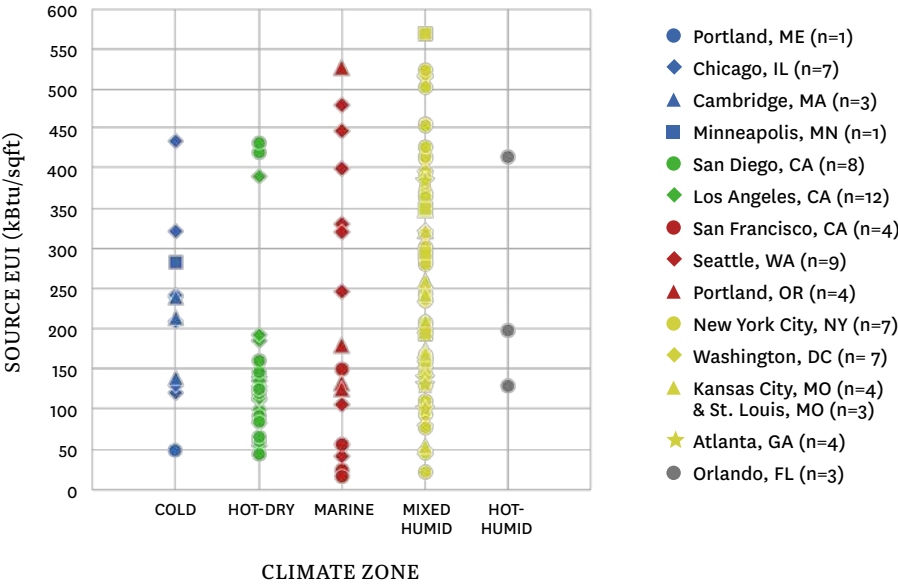
## Embracing Sustainability and Resiliency for a Better Tomorrow

JOYCE S. LEE, FAIA, LEED FELLOW

Glasgow 2021 will be a pivotal moment when leaders convene in Scotland to discuss the climate agreement at Conference of Parties (COP) 26. Since the September 2019 meeting of the International Council of Museums in Kyoto, Japan, there is now a global resolution on sustainability. The American Alliance of Museum (AAM) also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Climate Heritage Network in 2020. AAM’s Environment Climate Network has designed programs in 2021 with global partners, such as “Looking Ahead: Embracing sustainability and resiliency for a better tomorrow” and “On the Front Line: Arctic Museums and Climate Change” to build momentum.

We now know that museums can be more energy-intensive than hospitals. The work by IndigoJLD Green + Health provides a compelling reason for museums to measure their carbon footprint. The Energy Use Intensity (EUI) of is measured in kBtu/sqft based on real-world utility bills and museums are located in the national categories of Climate Zones: Cold, Hot-dry, Marine, Mixed-humid and Hot-humid. *(See below)*

### Climate footprint of museums



Source: IndigoJLD Green + Health

### Unique to the museum environment

While Energy Star Portfolio Manager is based in North America, where the majority of the 55,000 museums worldwide reside, Arc is a newer global platform designed to track buildings with common metrics, whether it is measuring energy in KBtu/sqft or GJ/m2. A universal carbon footprint is described in MTCO2e. In addition to energy and water data that is easily exchanged between platforms, the carbon footprint associated with transportation and waste elimination is emerging as a pressing topic for public institutions such as museums.

Recognizing the critical balance between collection care and energy efficiency, the latest ASHRAE Chapter 24 on museums and associated facilities has issued new guidance on humidity control, with updated tables. This includes a larger temperature and humidity range tolerance that will help museums reduce their carbon footprints, while protecting valuable objects and archives.

Another important topic is indoor environmental quality. The ongoing schedules of changing exhibits in museums and their resulting paints, chemical compounds and incoming exhibit materials constantly pose potential compromises on air quality. These significant museum functions would be best served by higher levels of air monitoring than are commonly in use. Not only would it enhance human health for the staff and visitors every day, but air quality data also gives the conservation department more opportunities to communicate with the facilities staff to ensure building envelope, lighting and HVAC maintenance will benefit the public, office and collection areas.

Collection Care and Lower Carbon

“The conservation profession melds art with science to preserve our cultural heritage for the future. Maintaining long-term preservation strategies, including implementing critical environmental solutions, with the guidance of conservation and preservation professionals, protect valued collections as well as the buildings in which they are housed,” notes Eryl Wentworth, Executive Director of the American Institute for Conservation.

The detrimental effects of uncontrolled relative humidity on museum collections are well known, including mold outbreaks, pest activity, metal corrosion, flaking paint, and cracks in wood, among the more visible signs. In storage spaces, museums can sustainably manage environmental conditions in a number of ways, from specially constructed Passive House buildings to low-energy mechanical system operation. In traveling exhibits, however, current loan requirements typically allow for very little flexibility in relative humidity, and the tighter the control, the more energy expenditure required.

This is where microclimates can be of great use. A microclimate is any space within a larger one where conditions differ. In this case, it means creating a space around objects on display with the relative humidity parameters required for the safe display of objects, allowing for better preservation conditions at lower energy costs. When well-sealed, exhibit cases act as a buffer against fluctuations in relative humidity in the larger exhibit area. The museum can then relax ambient conditions in the exhibit area itself to meet the lower-energy threshold of visitor and staff comfort.

Two recent examples, at the National Nordic Museum and the USS Constitution Museum, demonstrate how microclimates can be an effective solution.

The National Nordic Museum: Use of Desiccants in Exhibit Cases

In constructing a new facility opened in 2018, the National Nordic Museum achieved the low Energy Use Intensity (EUI) of 62.3 kBtu/sqft based on real-world utility bills, 48 percent lower than the baseline of 120 kBtu/sqft at the time of design—for which it won a 2020 AAM Sustainability Excellence Award (SEA).

As a museum located in Seattle, an area of the country known for its high seasonal humidity, a major hurdle in this achievement was designing how to maintain suitable humidity levels for objects without heavy energy use. The solution the museum identified, in collaboration with Ralph Appelbaum Associates, is to use microclimate control in select cases containing objects that require specific climate conditions. To do this, it uses ArtSorb, a pre-conditioned silica gel that can maintain relative humidity at 40, 50, or 60 percent. The amount of gel needed is dependent on the size of the space being conditioned, and it comes in different forms for use in a range of applications, including sheets inside framed works on paper and in “bricks” that can be integrated into the case itself. Several times a year, staff inspect the cases using the gel to ensure it is working properly.

An unexpected bonus of this solution was the ability to create a better visitor experience, since, by meeting the artworks’ needs locally, the gallery design could be more flexible without the need for doors to keep environmental conditions contained. It also saves considerable energy and financial resources, since the main galleries can have much larger humidity ranges.

The USS Constitution Museum: Dedicated Mechanical Systems for Exhibit Cases

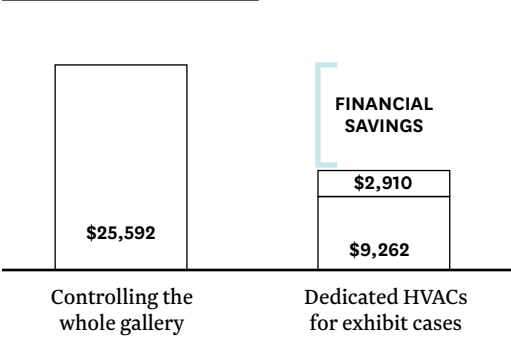
Another institution, the USS Constitution Museum (part of the Boston National Historical Park), worked with Innovative Construction & Design Solutions, LLC, to explore options to control relative humidity. Between the options to either control the whole gallery to 70°F and 55 percent relative humidity or maintain it at human comfort conditions and use four individual mechanical systems to condition the exhibit cases for relative humidity control, the museum chose the latter. It uses Keepsafe systems, a microclimate equipment placed near the display module. Even rough estimates indicate that the savings are significant (see below).

Modeled annual HVAC costs, including cooling, heating, fans, and pumps. The grey portion represents temperature control, the blue portion represents humidification. Using dedicated HVACs for the exhibit cases results in \$13,420/year financial savings and 60,573 kWh/year energy savings, as compared to conditioning the whole gallery to meet relative humidity requirements.

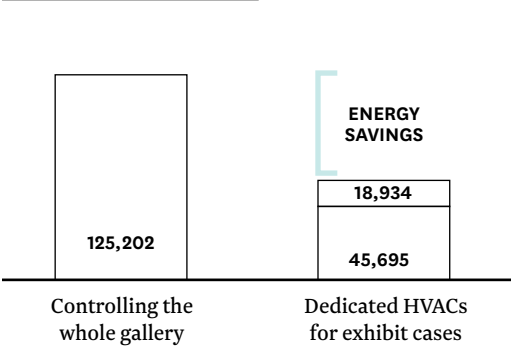
By decoupling the gallery and exhibit case conditions, the museum focuses on localized control of special artifacts. The museum reports that the Keepsafe system has been consistent, reliable, and primarily only requires monitoring of the water levels. The solution respects the fabric of the historic building, which is challenged with humidification in the winter, and allows the museum to display objects that would otherwise be too sensitive for display.



Annual HVAC Costs: Comparison of Options



Annual Energy Usage (in kWh): Comparison of Options



Looking Ahead

Both of these examples—using desiccants or a dedicated mechanical system to control relative humidity—focused on creating microclimates within exhibit cases to provide appropriate conditions for objects on display, rather than controlling large volumes of space. Decoupling the display of objects or collections with the larger gallery space can result in high energy savings. A quality building envelope could further these goals. Whether it is through the cases themselves, the use of desiccants, or small dedicated active units, microclimates have proven to be a more cost-effective and green way to provide safe environmental conditions for museum exhibits.

Opportunities for museums today and tomorrow

Centuries-old cultural institutions can also last well into the future. Longevity in museums can translate to a higher cumulative carbon footprint, so, considering that museums are designed for a long service life, “Design, Build, Operate Green” seems to be more important now than ever before.

Benchmarking in existing museums and tracking performance is an imperative. In new construction, the greenest design strategies could be embraced: minimizing embodied carbon while inspiring the community to think of the future as waste-, energy- and water-positive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joyce S. Lee, FAIA, LEED Fellow, is president of IndigoJLD, providing green health consulting, design, benchmarking, and planning services on exemplary projects. Joyce served under Mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg as Chief Architect at the New York City OMB. Her work has received numerous awards, such as those from the American Institute of Architects, US EPA, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



*Reimagine*, at temporary installation at Point Woronzof in Anchorage, a project of the Anchorage Museum's Seed Lab, focusing on sustainable communities.



# The Australian Museum and Climate Change

JENNY NEWELL

**The Australian Museum (AM) has committed to developing action on climate change and sustainability. Climate change presents us, and all species, with an enormous challenge. The AM is working to help people understand the scope of the challenge and recognize positive ways to respond.**

Acknowledging the position of trust that museums hold, the AM's priority is to provide up-to-date and accessible information to support public understanding of and engagement in climate change. The AM is helping to build public confidence in joining the conversation and taking positive action. Moreover, the AM has made a corporate commitment to sustainable practices within the Museum's operations and infrastructure. The AM recently achieved carbon neutral status.

The AM's collections span both the natural and human worlds, with 21.9 million items representing the combined natural and cultural environments of Australia, the Pacific and beyond. With these collections, the AM's researchers, educators and communicators are ideally placed to demonstrate climate change impacts on biota and people and to highlight solutions.

The AM's science plays an integral role in understanding, and potentially mitigating, the impacts of climate change on biological systems. Scientists at the AM are undertaking research that highlights the impact of climate change on species distributions and biodiversity, coral reef health (at the Lizard Island Research Station) and on human communities.

The AM's exhibitions, programs for schools, public programs and online resources provide pathways for people to make a difference. The exhibition 'Spark: Australian innovations tackling climate change' was staged in the AM's main hall for three months from 3 June 2021. Reusing existing exhibition furniture, the exhibition was created with a low carbon footprint and showcased timetested methods and exciting innovations for reducing emissions and restoring nature. From First Nations methods of caring for Country, protecting biodiversity, regenerative farming and seaweed farms to biotech, clean energy technologies and clean transport, the exhibition embodied a call to action for all. The exhibition was captured as a virtual tour, and further ways are being developed with video interviews with 12 innovators to continue the effort to close the gap between the solutions around us and public recognition. The AM expects to create a touring version of 'Spark', in response to interest from other institutions.

The permanent climate change exhibition, 'Changing Climate' explores the impacts of climate change in Australia and what we can do about it. With captivating images, objects, a video wall, video stories from people across a wide range of sectors, and a cartoon-style interactive map of Australia for young people to explore impacts and solutions, the exhibition is engaging across all ages. At the very minimum, Changing Climate ensures the AM's visitors recognize, even with a quick glance at the space while walking past, that climate change is real and serious – serious enough to be included in a museum – and, from the clear images, that the impacts are already underway in Australia. The section titled 'What can we do?' highlight collective action, featuring protest signs and an interactive about actions that we can take to reduce our emissions and restore nature.

'#Capturing Climate Change', is an online photographic exhibition that opened just after the 2019–2020 bushfires, with sets of photographs commissioned from photographers and climate activists. The exhibition was also, importantly, open to the public to submit photos with captions through the website or through a dedicated Instagram hashtag. This enabled a means for personal expression of grief, anxiety and hope to be shared through images of fires and extreme weather as well as images of backyard gardening, sustainability measures and climate strikes. Many images drew comments of support and solidarity from others.

These exhibitions enable the AM to showcase the exciting solutions we can all help advance. Whether learning from First Nations approaches to caring for Country, supporting biodiversity and increasing drawdown through regenerative practices or reducing emissions through clean energy and transport, the AM is making clear the benefits of acting together, now, to tackle the climate crisis. The AM is committed to supporting the upscaling of community engagement in the ways intergovernmental, professional and aid organizations are seeking.

Through collections, connections to audiences, deep time knowledge and a concern for the future, museums around the world are uniquely placed to empower public engagement. This is a fundamental social and environmental responsibility. Linking with other museums nationally and internationally, the AM is encouraging greater commitment to this responsibility as a matter of urgency.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jenny Newell is Manager, Climate Change Projects (Engagement, Exhibitions and Cultural Connection) at the Australian Museum. Jenny works on the cultural dimensions of climate change, focusing on communities in Australia and the Pacific. She aims to increase engagement in environmental stewardship through the medium of museums.

# Momentous: Documenting Profound Change

CRAIG MIDDLETON

Since at least mid-2019 Australia has experienced some of its most pronounced challenges, from 2019/2020 Australian bushfires to the COVID-19 global pandemic. These moments of crisis and profound change were not only felt in Australia but across the world, particularly the impacts of COVID-19. Call it intuition, but there was a palpable responsibility felt by staff at the National Museum of Australia to document as much as we could about what was happening to ensure a more representative picture of these moments for future generations.

As soon as the fires began in July 2019, the staff at the National Museum of Australia started thinking about how best to document the event for present and future generations. As the season progressed, and by mid-November it was clear that the fire event was different to those experienced before – it was longer, hotter, drier, and more dangerous. Before the bushfire season was declared over the first case of Covid-19 was record in Australia on 25 January 2020. What struck museum staff most about the human response to the two events was the flow of information on social and digital channels including social media and through mainstream media agencies. The imagery, the videography, the experiences were powerful, paralyzing and prolific.

Informed by what we were seeing and, in an attempt, to capture more than the medical and governmental response we developed and launched an online project. Momentous is at once a virtual exhibition, a digital archive, and a contemporary collecting project that brings together stories from the 2019/2020 Australian bushfire season and the Covid-19 global pandemic. Rather than segregating the two events of recent crisis, the project brings them together to offer a space for reflection on how a Nation responds to crisis and profound change. Momentous not only collects stories but (re)presents stories back to users in real time so that audiences online can read, view, and reflect on shared experiences irrespective of their active participation in the project.

What sets projects like Momentous apart, particularly to the kind of work that museums have historically undertaken, is crowdsourcing – which I believe has a much greater impact through online projects. As users create and submit content, they contribute to the construction of knowledge and memory. Crowdsourcing ensures users play an active role in the making of history, and in many ways democratizes the creation of collective memory. Momentous and projects like it are attempting to pluralize narratives of the past which by virtue becomes the benchmark of how we understand moments in time and contemporary experience, as groups, communities, and in the case of Momentous, a nation.

Responding to contemporary moments of crisis and profound change requires museums to move beyond linear, cohesive narratives and create spaces for complex and contradictory narratives to exist together. This involves creating spaces where active dialogue is possible between such narratives to form a richer understanding of the past that considers the many and varied lived experiences of those who inhabit this world. And while we acknowledge the limitations of digital projects, including access to the internet, privacy issues and more – through our engagement with digital technologies museums can progress the mission of a more complex and nuanced understanding of history.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Craig Middleton is Senior Curator, Digital Innovation & Strategy, at the National Museum of Australia.

# Empower Young People to Lead Change

CECILIA LAM

The world is facing unprecedented sustainability challenges. The Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change (MoCC) at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), Hong Kong, believes in empowering young people to create solutions. The MoCC offers a platform of service learning for university students, the future leaders of our society, to act on climate threats and make a change that counts.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cecilia Lam is the Chief Sustainability Officer of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). She is also the Founding Director of the Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change and the newly-established Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development Office at CUHK. With a portfolio covering strategic planning and sustainability in higher education, she oversees the program operations of the Hong Kong Chapter of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN Hong Kong) and serves as a co-convenor of the Hong Kong Sustainable Campus Consortium. [www.mocc.cuhk.edu.hk](http://www.mocc.cuhk.edu.hk)

## Train the trainers

The MoCC is committed to nurturing future sustainability leaders and, since its establishment in December 2013, has been offering structured, year-long training and internship to select students of CUHK. Every year the museum recruits and selects by interview MoCC Ambassadors from among undergraduate and graduate students from all disciplines. Typically, a student admitted to the MoCC Ambassadorship serves for two or three years before graduation, contributing to a team of about 100 serving ambassadors a year.

Students admitted to the ambassadorship receive intensive training in climate change and museum operations before they are ready to contribute to a range of museum services and events. By guiding tours and leading workshops, the MoCC Ambassadors’ participation also brings themselves endless educational benefits. Much of these students’ leadership skill and learning has evolved through their engagement and interaction with the visitors and participants.

The MoCC Ambassadors are trained to communicate climate change effectively to visitors from all walks of life. Our visitors range from professors to kindergarten teachers, and from retirees to pre-school children. An important feature of the MoCC Ambassadorship is the experiential learning opportunities. For example, the museum’s guided tours are run by the MoCC Ambassadors. We encourage and allow the ambassadors to ‘own’ the guided tour they offer. This approach has enabled them to experiment and learn by participation, while also increasing the museum’s capacity to offer a more responsive and personalized service to its visitors.

Some of the most experienced and committed ambassadors are assigned the role of mentor, each responsible for grooming four to six new joiners. After graduation, many senior ambassadors return to support the museum in ways more than ambassador training. For example, former MoCC Ambassadors pursuing graduate study in renowned institutions such as University of Oxford and Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences have collaborated with us on exhibition and tour curation and delivery, sharing their newly-acquired knowledge and the perspective of a budding researcher with the community.

## Engage stakeholders

The MoCC is a university museum committed to social responsibility. We reach out to members of the public to alert them to the urgency of tackling climate change. The MoCC Ambassadorship enables the students to be part of this effort in communicating climate change to the community and motivating the stakeholders to undertake collective climate action.

To effectively engage the community, we must first engage our students. Student engagement is maximized through the cultivation of a sense of ownership among the MoCC Ambassadors by allowing them to partake in behind-the-scene

projects including exhibition research, social media campaign development and research, and the design and enhancement of tour scripts and visitor surveys.

We also strive to maintain a friendly, productive mentorship (instead of employment) relationship with the MoCC Ambassadors. It is our responsibility to ensure that they see themselves as co-creators and co-owners of the museum. We continuously engage and empower the ambassadors through staff-student meetings and peer-to-peer mentorships, encouraging their ideas, listening to their views and rewarding their accomplishments.

These ownership-building approaches give the MoCC Ambassadors a sense of engagement and enable them to effectively and wholeheartedly serve at the museum to inspire change in the community.

## Scale the impact

We have trained a total of 730 ambassadors since the inception of the museum about eight years ago, who have served more than 335,000 members of the public. The positive impacts of the MoCC Ambassadorship are also felt beyond the trained ambassadors. This multiplier effect is remarkable, averaging about 460 beneficiaries for one ambassador trained.

There are direct and measurable impacts of the MoCC Ambassadorship on the student ambassadors themselves and the visitors they serve. A recent longitudinal study tracking the changes in knowledge, attitudes and behavior of the student ambassadors suggests that 80% of the interviewees show signs of knowledge improvement, 93% are committed to adopting a low-carbon lifestyle, and 80% have demonstrated improved solutions-seeking initiative or actual behavioral changes after completing a full-year ambassadorship.

The MoCC Ambassadors’ efforts have been recognized by the visitors. In a recent survey, more than 90% of the respondents said that they had a better understanding of climate change after visiting the museum, had become more aware of their action in relation to climate change, and were willing to share climate and sustainability awareness with their family and friends. The visitors’ positive feedback will support behavioral changes and in the long run result in a more climate-friendly society.

We encourage other museums, schools and cultural institutions to replicate the MoCC Ambassadorship. The key to success is the provision of rich and relevant experiential learning opportunities that prepare young people for sustainability leadership roles and enable them to further influence their peers, families and others.

Museums educate people. People change the world. The MoCC will continue playing a creative role in molding a future generation of leaders who understand climate reality and know their own value as change agents for sustainability.

# On Word Choice

KIRK GALLARDO

*Disclaimer: In writing this article, terminology in quotations is listed in full for clarity without the intent of offending.*

Language changes. Usually, people do not spend much time thinking of when words specifically go out of common use. Consider the words ‘fro’ ‘spick’ and ‘span’ as in the expressions ‘to and fro’ and ‘spick and span’. At some point in the English language, these words must have existed in wider use, gradually falling into these specific expressions. For the most part, people use the language others around them use. Acceptability manifests through usage and people learn to delineate linguistic registers like formality depending on the context of language through experience. In addition to how people perceive language in their daily use, terms used by entities such as media and government also set the pace for how people perceive language, and in turn infer public permissibility of usage.

In 2016, then-president Barack Obama signed H.R.4238 - To amend the Department of Energy Organization Act and the Local Public Works Capital Development and Investment Act of 1976 to modernize terms relating to ethnic minorities. This law sought to change language used in defining ethnic minorities in the United States. While Rep. Grace Meng of New York, the sponsor of this bill, was quoted as saying, “The term ‘Oriental’ has no place in federal law and at long last this insulting and outdated term will be gone for good”, H.R.4238 only addresses amending previous terminology. As such, terms such as ‘Oriental’ may feasibly exist on future federal forms.

Three years prior, the Census Bureau removed ‘Negro’ as a category from any of its surveys after first officially using the term in census forms in 1900. Additionally, a 2016 notice for the Office of Management and Budget on redefining standards for maintaining, collecting, and presenting data on race and ethnicity is under review by the Biden administration at the time of writing this piece. This notice would effectively refine how people identify on federal forms beyond the current broad categories.

Given these examples, what should museums make of efforts and issues that involve terminology?

Word choice matters and that what people consider acceptable is dynamic. Word choice change in any language community is never a single continuous explicit process; some words are left in an ambiguous state, are forgotten about, and/or take on the appearance of a neutral term for the broader population.

In the case of H.R.4238, the intent of the act falls short of preventing future usage. Simply updating word choice does not directly address issues regarding terminology and usage in the first place. For museums, this translates similarly. As institutions that connect with schools and the wider public, museums provide an additional place to foster curiosity and learning. Consequently, terminology within museums has the capacity to reinforce or challenge views. For museum educators and staff interacting with the public, this means considering, and being open to reconsidering word choice. In the Anchorage Museum’s Education Department, explanations for using certain terminology in educational resources are explicitly stated where terms differ from more commonly used ones. These decisions are not arbitrary but are informed by partner organizations, community members, and staff who hold additional perspectives. In aligning with these choices, the hope is to also have audiences broaden their understanding and reconsider terminology previously taken for granted.

Though the process of changing terminology within a museum comes with its own set of logistical issues, the perception of a museum’s role as a western cultural institution proves to be an even greater challenge. As colonial entities, museums historically represent a type of authority that dictated rather than collaborated. Despite many museums moving away from this older paradigm, the stigma of museums as an unchallengeable authority remains for many communities. The key to meaningful change comes from multilateral communication and incorporating the perspectives of those who museums represent in their collections. For many museum education departments, this can include explaining nuance in terminology, creating spaces in curriculum and programs for non-standard pedagogical approaches, acknowledging the authority of other communities when it comes to specialized knowledge, and including terminology from additional languages.

So why is any of this important? Words have meanings, and many have extended associations that can often lead to assumptions. Consider marketing for children’s toys and accessories. The words that marketing departments use in advertising rely on buyer’s perceptions of

their young dependents and whether they associate them with the language used in the advertisement. Keep in mind that this is independent of how a child may feel about how marketing departments describe them. Likewise, adults and educators play a passive role in reinforcing how children interpret the world around them. The language that adults and educators use in retelling past events or explaining concepts may be the only perspective many children have until adulthood unless otherwise challenged. For museum educators outside of the school system, language becomes an opportunity to challenge current interpretations of events and concepts.

As museum educators, teaching future generations the impact of their words becomes increasingly important as the global community begins to face shared challenges such as climate change and large-scale pandemics. How people discuss these issues and the terminology they use will shape relationships between communities and the solutions that come from collaboration for years to come. Though it may be easy to dismiss terminology as ‘a matter of semantics’; the reality is that it has always been, and that is important.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kirk Gallardo is the Education Interpretation Manager at the Anchorage Museum.

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# Like Betzy

## What Did Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum Do, and Why?

CHARIS GULLICKSON AND  
KJETIL RYDLAND

The learning-and-engagement program which Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (Northern Norway Art Museum, hereafter NNNM) produced in connection with the exhibition *Like Betzy* – about the artist Betzy Akersloot-Berg (1850–1922) – was perhaps the most ambitious project of its type which the museum has ever done. In many respects, it incited NNNM to follow new paths. The goal of the exhibition project as a whole was to realize a different kind of art-historical exhibition than any the museum had previously produced. Among other things, we wanted to activate Akersloot-Berg’s art in ways that would start a debate on equality and gender perspectives in today’s artworld and in society as a whole. This article is about our strategies, not only in the museum but also outdoors in public spaces in the cities of Tromsø and Harstad, to facilitate public engagement with *Like Betzy*. Evaluated in relation to our exhibition goals, some strategies worked well while others did not have the desired effect. What is certain, however, is that the exhibition and the mediation strategies triggered reactions and involvement amongst a wide and diverse public – an outcome that, for the museum, is valuable in itself. We share our experiences in order to say something about how museums administer historical material, and how this material can be made accessible to the public in diverse ways.

The article starts by presenting Akersloot-Berg, thus enabling a better understanding of the project. We then look a bit at the background for the exhibition and the process leading to its realization, the cross-disciplinary work, and the museum’s strategies for the learning-and-engagement program. Then we summarize: How was this exhibition received by the public, and what did we learn? The article authors – the exhibition curator (Charis Gullickson) and the museum’s head of communications (Kjetil Rydland) – were part of a larger cross-disciplinary project group with responsibility to develop the exhibition concept and the concept for public engagement and learning.

### Betzy Akersloot-Berg

Betzy Akersloot-Berg was an important and well-known artist in her own lifetime. She is nevertheless practically unknown in Norway today and is barely mentioned in Norwegian art history. This is the starting point for the exhibition *Like Betzy* and for NNNM’s program for helping the public learn about and engage with her artistic career.

Betzy Akersloot-Berg grew up in Aurskog, a village east of Christiania (re-named Oslo in 1925) in the mid-1800s. In her 20s, for five years, she worked as a nurse in Finnmark, Norway’s most northerly region, before deciding to become a painter. Almost no art schools accepted female students, but by studying on her own and with established male painters in Central Europe, she experienced success in her own lifetime. She specialized in maritime painting and traveled and painted throughout all of Europe. Akersloot-Berg returned regularly to Norway to paint, particularly to Northern Norway. She won much recognition and participated in several prestigious exhibitions both in Norway and elsewhere in Europe. She exhibited at Norway’s national Autumn Exhibition (three times), the World Exposition in Paris, and the Salon in Paris (five times). Furthermore, she experienced commercial success and generally received favorable reviews in the press. She painted commissioned works for the German Kaiser Wilhelm II, meeting him at a whaling station on the island of Skorøya – just beyond Vannøya in Troms – on July 15, 1892. Akersloot-Berg was one of many Norwegian artists who were active at a time when *nation building* was a major project; in connection with this, art was used to support a movement that ultimately led to Norway gaining independence from Sweden. Akersloot-

Berg’s pictures of Norway’s distinctive nature, also of its modern harbors, whaling ships, and merchant vessels bear witness of national pride in the same way as do works by Adolph Tidemand, Peder Balke, Otto Sinding and others. She had a strong personality and did exactly as she herself chose, regardless of limited opportunities for women and the norms of the day. In 1893 she married a Netherlander, Gooswinus Gerardus Akersloot, and settled on the island of Vlieland in the Netherlands.

**Art moves?**

Museums are not neutral. It is impossible to create exhibitions, learning-and-engagement programs, or other initiatives that are completely devoid of ideology, politics, and hegemonic influence, for instance over what types of art are seen as most valuable. Museums can be relevant arenas in which to work for social and political change and to stimulate social development. As a museum, NNKM’s goal is to be present in society, easily accessible, and a voice for justice, openness, and ordinary creativity. The staff have the attitude that institutions for art and culture, NNKM included, should be more aware of their role in society and do more to get involved in the critical issues of our time, also that museums should be proactive and able to create change and new spaces of possibility.

NNKM’s vision and mantra is Art moves. In this there lies the belief that everything – feelings, ideas, politics, knowledge, and society – can be galvanized by art. The vision and the mantra prompt several questions: How can an art museum do anything more than get hold of some pictures and hang them on the wall? And when it comes to this particular exhibition: How can NNKM activate and challenge the public to see Betzy Akersloot-Berg’s pictures in light of our own era’s critical issues? With the title “Like Betzy,” NNKM wanted to direct critical attention to marginalized stories from and in the North. Who is “like” Betzy today? How can the museum activate the stories of forgotten people? Who writes history and who has the power to make definitions? The museum performance *Sámi Dáiddamusea* (2017), in which NNKM disappeared for two months and was conceptually replaced by a fictive Sámi art museum, was developed on the basis of this attitude and with a desire to challenge the stories usually told at the museum and the established way of organizing exhibitions. The project was produced through collaboration with RiddoDuottarMuseat (RDM).<sup>1</sup> It drew lots of attention and generated many conversations in public discourse on the fact of there being a Sámi art collection but no Sámi art museum. NNKM won the Norwegian Art Critic’s Prize that year, and it also won the accolade ‘Museum of the Year,’ which it dedicated to *Sámi Dáiddamusea*.<sup>2</sup> Three years later, in 2020, we initiated another critical museum performance: NNKM was transformed into *HOS* (“Handle, Opplive, Skape,” meaning “Act, Experience, Create”).

This was a temporary museum for *craft*, the central components of which were creativity, participation, *craftivism*,<sup>3</sup> and the joy of creativity. Paintings, photos, videos, and other visual art were packed away and replaced solely with craft and *duodji*.<sup>4</sup> The exhibition rooms were transformed into a café and maker space in order to create places where people could work with their own projects, borrow equipment, and take craft courses. In this project as well, the museum worked further on its ambition to raise critical questions about power structures in the artworld, the museum world, and the wider society. During this period, NNKM’s professional staff began working with new and important theoretical perspectives in the field of museology, among others, those discussed in Nina Simon’s book *The Participatory Museum* (2010) and Claire Bishop’s *Radical Museology* (2013). Simon asks: “How can cultural institutions use participatory techniques not just to give visitors a voice, but to develop experiences that are more valuable and compelling for everyone?” She defines a participant-based art institution as “a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content.”<sup>5</sup> NNKM has explored these ideas for several years and has gradually taken bigger steps to become a participatory museum. In 2017, during Britta Marakatt-Labba’s exhibition, we began by inviting visitors to participate in creating a communal embroidery, and we ended up with an open creative workshop during *HOS*.

The projects from 2017 to 2020 were developed with a desire to contribute to change and innovation, and while they were well received by art critics and the press, we still know little about the wider public: How did various groups respond to the participatory-museum concept? If one is to take it seriously, much remains to be done in order to involve the public in all museum activities.

**Teamwork, collaboration, and ownership**

Under Jérémie McGowan’s leadership, NNKM worked with “design thinking” and “new museology” as important components of the museum’s work method and identity.<sup>6</sup> Design thinking involves a mindset, a process, and several methodologies. It is about getting organizations to put users at the center of attention and to design services and products that make it possible to understand problems and test hypotheses. <sup>7</sup> Design thinking is gradually starting to be used in museums around the world. As an extension of new museology, McGowan introduced project methodology at NNKM, based on collegial teamwork. Some of the goals are that the organizational structure should be as flat as possible, that the staff should work in cross-disciplinary ways, that everyone should do *professional museum* work, and that the museum’s values – openness, co-production, relevance – should function as tools and starting points for all projects. Everything the museum does should

be rooted in these values. All this forms the backstory for the development of *Like Betzy*.

The exhibition was organized through collaboration with Tromp’s Huys – a museum established in Akersloot-Berg’s home on Vlieland. Most of the pictures were borrowed from the collection of Tromp’s Huys. The *Like Betzy* project had a high degree of openness starting right from the concept phase, initiating brainstorming sessions with other actors in Tromsø such as Perspektivet Museum, KVINNForsk (a center for women’s studies and gender studies at UiT Arctic University of Norway), the research project RESCAPE, and WOW/Walls of Women Tromsø. Several external actors were invited to participate in developing ideas for the project, thus to generate ownership, both internally and in the local environment. One result of this was that the external actors were inspired to create their own projects about Betzy Akersloot-Berg parallel to the exhibition at NNKM. The project *Betzy i Folkeparken* (“Betzy in Folkeparken Open-Air Museum”) was one of Perspektivet Museum’s efforts to create new traces in the open-air museum based on the theme of “coastal women.” In the museum’s outdoor facility in Folkeparken, the public could draw and paint in a “Betzy-crate”<sup>8</sup> located by the shore. The artist Elind Rui Blix, through collaboration with Perspektivet Museum and WOW, made an Akersloot-Berg-inspired wall painting on a boat house in Folkeparken.

The exhibition team consisted of internal and external contributors. Representing NNKM were curator Charis Gullickson, head of learning and engagement Ingrid Skovgaard, museum director Jérémie McGowan, museum technician Øystein Oldervoll, and head of communications Kjetil Rydland. External participants were co-curator and art historian Trix Scherjon, who has studied Betzy Akersloot-Berg’s art in detail,<sup>9</sup> graphic designer Liv Ragnhild Kjellman, exhibition architect Yngvar Julin, and Marc & Stella AS, specialists in exhibition technology and production.<sup>10</sup>

**STRATEGIES FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING**

**Language**

The language in the exhibitions has been a focal area for NNKM in recent years. The aim has been to use a clear and distinct language that enriches *everyone’s* experience of the art. But an art museum’s public is diverse; different visitors have different needs. Before the corona pandemic, tourists comprised the majority of visitors, so we needed always to take into consideration that many had little knowledge of Norway, Norwegian history, society, and culture. At the same time, we have prioritized being a natural gathering place for the local community and the region, so we must offer information and texts that also challenge visitors who have more prior knowledge. NNKM wants to offer good experiences to artists, people with knowledge

of art, kindergarteners, pensioners, and people with different social and educational backgrounds. Finally, one must also take the art into consideration, the space it requires, how its physical distance to other elements should be adjusted, and let the art speak for itself. The discussions between the learning-and-engagement team, communicators, and curators about how much text there should be in exhibitions is always interesting and necessary. NNKM has not developed general standards for such matters, but makes decisions about them based on evaluating the total situation of each project. Some of the museum’s exhibitions are geared towards specific user groups. To achieve success in this respect, we must involve users more in the process of developing the texts. For *Like Betzy*, it was challenging to find the right amount of text and information and the right words, mainly because Akersloot-Berg’s art becomes more engaging when seen in light of the biographical and historical contexts. It was rewarding to explore words and the use of language in our effort to get closer to this historical artist and link her history to our own era.

Fundamental to all our learning-and-engagement initiatives is a desire to “say it like it is,” in other words, to use an understandable, honest, and clear language – without being banal or simplifying it to the point where it is bland or too basic. NNKM wants as few barriers as possible to block the public’s experience, such that we can generate engagement and make an impact. To give the public a full-value experience, we saw it as necessary to situate Akersloot-Berg in quite a comprehensive context. *Like Betzy* therefore became a word-rich exhibition with many long wall texts. It became essential to maintain good, precise, and understandable language. We also used activist language in our efforts to unlock the power of the exhibition. We wanted to show that differences are strengthened through the defining power of language. What do visitors think about reading long wall texts in a museum space? Are they willing to exert that much energy – regardless of whether the intentions behind the text are good?

To refer to people only by their first name is a linguistic strategy often used when referring to female artists. Today, just as in the past, it is normal to refer to male artists only by their last name: Munch, Warhol, Tidemand, Balke. For female artists, one always includes the first name, or only uses the first name: Louise (Bourgeois), Frida (Kahlo), Kitty (Kielland), Oda (Krohg), Harriet (Backer) or Betzy. Such a practice may contribute to robbing women of authority, ownership, professional status, identity, and recognition. For *Like Betzy*, therefore, we chose to refer to any mentioned male artists by also using their first names (to the extent that it was

possible). Admittedly, it can be claimed that NNKM fell into the same trap by calling the exhibition *Like Betzy*. But since we wanted a title that could engage with the idea of visitors discovering and liking the artist, and our desire to trigger thoughts about *who* today might be like her, the best solution seemed to be only to use Betzy. But did we undermine her role as a professional artist by doing this?

Another example of our deliberate use language was the decision to call Akersloot-Berg a “badass.” In the exhibition, we presented her as “a badass marine painter, island queen, and globetrotter who follower her own path, a path that always led to the sea, her ‘only great longing’.” We called her a badass instead of describing her in a more conventional way, for instance as hardworking or independent. Why did we use the descriptor “badass,” and what meaning did we invest in it?

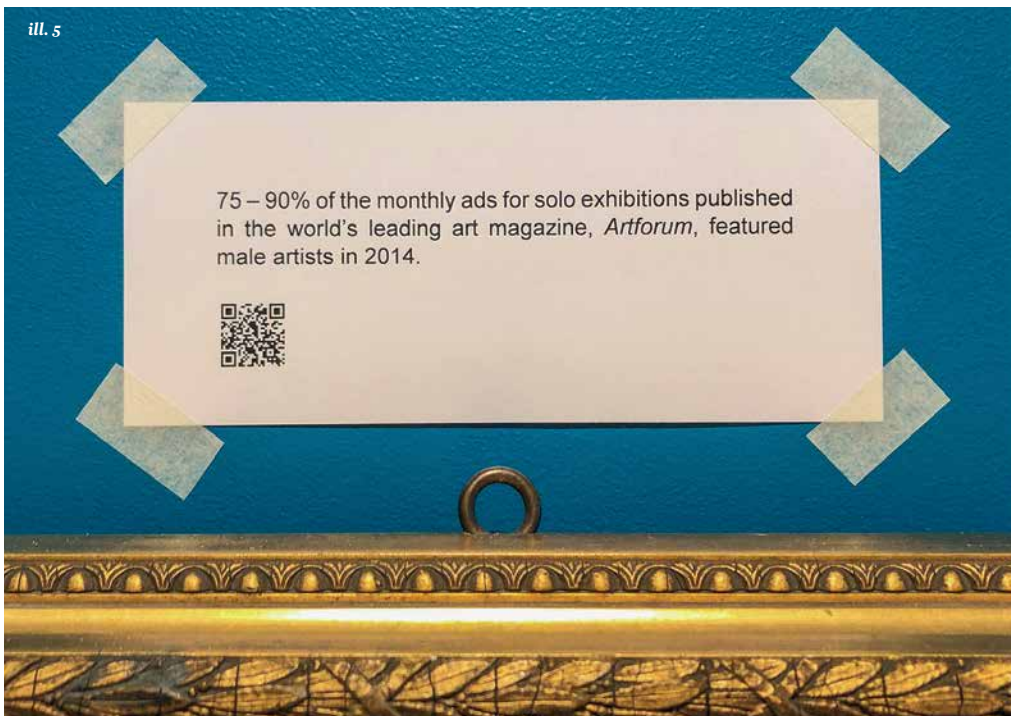
When first coined, “badass” was not a positive adjective, but it has in recent years gained a different meaning.<sup>11</sup> The original meaning is akin to “bully,” but it is now in many contexts used to describe people who are courageous, independent, and enterprising. In popular feminist writing, the term has become a laudatory descriptor for women who stake out their own path independently of patriarchy, who dare to play roles in public life, and who speak their mind; they are not bothered by others’ opinions about their way of being a woman or a person.<sup>12</sup> The project group formulated three ways of describing a badass:

- A badass remains true to herself, always.
- A badass never gives up.
- A badass will always strive to do better, regardless of how difficult it is.

Many visitors misunderstood the concept, or they were bewildered by it, or did not know it was an English word. Some thought the museum was trying to be cool or to appeal to young people.<sup>13</sup> We chose it because we experienced it as so fitting for Betzy Akersloot-Berg as a person and a woman, but also because it is a word that we ourselves use; it was “saying it like it is.” In retrospect, we recognize that it was not as liberating as we thought, and that by removing one barrier for some visitors, we raised a new barrier for others.

**Biographical presentation in the exhibition**

One basic problem with presenting an artist about whom few people know anything is precisely that few people know anything about her. We could have chosen a minimalistic approach and exhibited her art more or less without a context – Akersloot-Berg’s oeuvre is interesting in its own right – but seen in light of her life and times, it is fascinating. We



therefore wanted to present contexts relating to both her life and the time in which she lived. The challenge was thus to give the public *a lot* of information in the simplest and most accessible way possible. We do not know enough about how our visitors experience reams of text in an exhibition, but we do know they want information. Furthermore, many NNKM staff members have experienced that if visitors can see with their mind’s eye, or – better yet – see themselves as badasses who follow a self-chosen path, who climb aboard a whaling ship and paint while being tied to the mast, they will gain a deeper and better understanding that will in turn result in a better experience of the art. NNKM has a goal to work towards, namely, *to show, not tell*, and wants clear, visual information that is easy to understand and possible to absorb in the relatively short time our average visitor spends in the museum.

One device was a 12-meter-long timeline that extended through three rooms and almost the whole exhibition. It presented key events in Betzy’s life through texts and photos, momentous events in society that were relevant for her life, plus important events in the women’s rights movement. We tried to give just enough relevant information and, as much as possible, let visitors draw their own conclusions. One important point for NNKM was to emphasize that Betzy traveled a great deal in Northern Norway, yet without receiving honor for having artistically “discovered” various areas of land such as Otto Sinding and Peder Balke are recognized for. Again, it was important for us to tell visitors about this and to visualize it. In collaboration with co-curator Scherjon, we made a list of the places we knew for certain Akerslout-Berg had visited, with data from letters and paintings. The exhibition’s graphic designer, Liv Ragnhild Kjellman, could then make a map showing Akerslout-Berg’s extensive travel activity as compared with that of the “Lofoten painters” Otto Sinding and Peder Balke. When the exhibition opened, the map was four meters in diameter and extended almost four meters up the wall (*ill. 1*). 1st map This proved to be a bad idea because the most important area – Northern Norway – was almost impossible to see. When we additionally discovered an error on the map, it behooved us to replace it with a far less impressive but all the more informative map (*ill. 2*). 2nd map Once again, just as many times before, it becomes clear that it is not until an exhibition has opened that one sees what actually works. Hopefully, one has the resources to make the changes needed to give the public an even better experience.

The above-outlined devices for facilitating the public’s engagement with the exhibition borrow from what the museum itself has experienced of “toolchests” for museums of natural and cultural history. NNKM had previously avoided using historical pictures,

biographies, juxtapositions of art and cultural-historical artefacts, and fact-centered texts in the exhibition rooms themselves, choosing instead to refer visitors to catalogues and books. In mediating natural history and cultural history, the *history and knowledge* are often seen as the most important aspects, while NNKM, being a museum for visual art, has been afraid of drawing attention away from the experience of the art. On the exhibition’s periphery (where biography was the theme), we took steps in this new direction. From Museum Tromp’s Huys, we borrowed several of Akerslout-Berg’s objects, examples being her palette, painting equipment, family crest, and clock, in other words, objects primarily of cultural-historical interest. We also redecorated the museum’s small café corner and used furniture and porcelain tableware manufactured during her lifetime, again, in order to enhance the public’s understanding of a unique life that is both distant and near to our own time. The museum conceived as a “white cube” has its advantages, and it has primarily been NNKM’s starting point for exhibitions. This time, however, we wanted to enable anyone, no matter their background, to walk in and understand the exhibition, to feel it with their body, and see it as relevant for their own time.

#### Activate the collection

Norwegian art museums hardly have any works by Betzy Akerslout-Berg in their collections. The National Museum in Oslo has two works,<sup>14</sup> Stavanger Art Museum has one, NNKM has one, and Perspektivet Museum has four. Perhaps this is one reason why she has been largely forgotten. Art museums the world over have in recent years focused increasingly on female artists, but this emphasis is still not reflected in collections.<sup>15</sup> Despite the big initiative in 2019, NNKM still only has one work by Akerslout-Berg (*ill. 3*). NNKM’s work by Betzy Akerslout-Berg Marginalized groups such as female and Sámi artists are priority areas for the further development of NNKM’s collection.

In the exhibition, NNKM activated its own collection by presenting works of craft made during Akerslout-Berg’s lifetime – textiles, vases, a candelabra – plus paintings by Peder Balke, Otto Sinding, Christian Krohg, and Adelsteen Normann. We included craft and design objects from the Viggo Hagstrøm Donation<sup>16</sup> and deliberately chose not to use white-painted pedestals with glass vitrines. In an attempt to activate the objects, the vases were filled with artificial flowers and placed on a massive base painted shocking pink. Colors from Akerslout-Berg’s pictures were used in the exhibition’s thematic categories: her biography (pink), the sea (green), Vlieland (red), and Northern Norway (blue). A silver candelabra from the Hagstrøm Donation was placed on a piano, and the public were invited to play (*ill. 4*).

#### Hacks

It is impossible to see Betzy Akerslout-Berg’s art and life without thinking of the struggle for women’s rights. During her life, she saw women win basic rights and play a steadily increasing role in the art world. But as we all know, there are still imbalances and a lack of equality in many fields, also in art. A recent survey by Equality Check shows that Norway’s largest art museums contain more than 130,000 works. Only 10% of these are by women.<sup>17</sup> NNKM had to make this visible to the general public. Much good research and investigative journalism have been done on the topic, and we found 21 “unfun facts” which we hung up in the exhibition. We wanted to present these as elements that disturb the otherwise polished expression, generate discomfort, plus draw associations to activism and guerrilla tactics. We therefore printed the facts on white paper and taped them up several places in the exhibition using light-colored masking tape. All the factual statements included a QR-code referring to their URL source (*ill. 5*). Photo of a hack NNKM’s own collection is also imbalanced, so we included some of our own statistics in the “unfun facts,” along with facts about the National Museum in Oslo, MoMA, Museo del Prado, sales statistics, and the amount of Norwegian kroner spent on advertising for exhibitions for male artists versus for female artists. Some examples:

- A massive overrepresentation of male artists is normal in the art world today. In 2004, 4% of the exhibitions at MoMA in New York were for female artists. In 2015, there were 7% – an increase of 3% in 11 years.
- Museo del Prado in Madrid opened in 1819. Its first solo exhibition for a female artist was in 2016.
- 94% of the profit from secondary sales of art in Norway in 2017 was for works by male artists.
- At present, art works by women comprise 29% of Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum’s collection.
- In 2018, the National Gallery in London bought its first painting by a woman since 1991. 21 of the 2,300 works in the collection are now by women. This is 0.9%.

Another hack was directed at the work label for Gerhard Munthe’s *The Suitors (Daughters of the Northern Lights)* (1892) – a tapestry from the Hagstrøm Donation – with a quote from Munthe: “Sigrun wove, and I wound balls of yarn.”<sup>18</sup> Sigrun, Munthe’s wife, wove several tapestries, but she was not given credit on the work label in this exhibition or in exhibitions during her lifetime. We think that presenting the quote was an effective method for spotlighting a core theme of the exhibition and showing its enduring relevance today.

ill. 6

DO YOU KNOW OF A BETZY?

A Betzy is a person who has the courage to choose a self-chosen path and to follow a dream. Someone who is complex and dares to reveal many facets of their personality, even if contradictory. Someone who can be daring and tactical, but also sensory and sensitive simultaneously. Someone who is full of surprises and is their own person.

Do you know a Betzy, or have you met or heard of one? Maybe a great-grandmother, a neighbor, someone from school, or someone who dares to be different? Share with us by using one of these postcards, and contribute to what will be remembered by posterity. We’re collecting stories about people who were well-known in their environment and in their own era, but who today are overlooked or perhaps forgotten. Make your mark on the exhibition.

INSTRUCTIONS

Take a postcard and write about a Betzy. Write to whomever you want. A Betzy can be someone you like a lot, or someone who means something special to you, someone you look up to, or maybe Betzy herself?

Hang the postcard on the board. Don’t take it home. We would very much like to read your story.

You are now part of the exhibition!

P.S. When the board is full, we’ll make room for new postcards by storing the previously-written cards in the writing desk. Your story will be accessible to others during the whole exhibition period.

Postcard station

In the process of organizing the exhibition, the project group talked a lot about how to make Betzy relevant for today. The project group saw her as a strong and fascinating person with a rich history that no one knew anything about. At the same time, we thought about all the other people we know about who have similarly inspiring lives: grandmothers, other relatives, teachers, acquaintances, “village idiots,” and local heroes. We wanted to plant the idea of Betzy’s life as not so unique after all. In line with Simon’s ideas about participatory museums, we wanted to give visitors the possibility to tell us about people they know of who are like Betzy, but first and foremost, to tell each other. Ingrid Skovgaard came up with the idea of setting up a postcard station.

We therefore got hold of an antique writing desk and table that could serve as a postcard station. The cards were designed by the museum staff using old photos of Akerslout-Berg on the front. The reverse contained elements from her own postcards. With a wall poster, we invited visitors to write a postcard about someone who is “like Betzy.”(ill. 6).

We received well over 100 postcards. Visitors wrote about grandmothers, friends, neighbors, artists, and acquaintances. These responses were moving. 100 contributions, however, is not many when considering how many people saw the exhibition. How is it possible to get more people to respond and participate?

The painting crate

One of Betzy’s signature possessions was a crate which she sat inside when she painted outdoors. As a *plein air* painter, it was important for her to paint the world then and there, in nature, in order to get as close as possible to her subject matter. She therefore had a large crate made, one that could contain an easel, a bench, and space for equipment – everything she needed in order to remain outdoors for extended painting sessions. She received help when setting up the crate outdoors, and at the end of a session, would raise a flag to signal that she was ready to be picked up. This gave us the idea of letting visitors sit inside this sort of crate. Thanks to photos of Betzy and her crate, we were able to build a replica and to include it in the exhibition (ill. 7). Tromp’s Huys’s photo of Betzy in her painting crate Despite the “Please touch” icon, many visitors did not understand that they could sit inside the crate, or they simply did not dare. We therefore do not think this turned out as we had hoped. In retrospect, we see that we could have clarified the purpose of the replica, perhaps also gone a step further by putting drawing equipment inside and setting up visual subject matter for a “Be like Betzy” station (ill. 8). NNKM’s replica of the painting crate

The art of touching

“Please touch” icons showed visitors what they could touch in the exhibition. A selection of Betzy Akerslout-Berg’s works on paper were printed on three textile rolls. Visitors could experience the works at close range, touch and leaf through drawings and etchings. Textile rolls showing works on paper.

Roald Like Betzy

The understanding of history is still largely dominated by men. Men have written about other men who discovered, invented, conquered, wrote, and painted. Men are still to a great extent presented as having defined the *zeitgeist* and as having laid out visions for the future. They created national identities in their own image, and they stand on pedestals in all Norwegian cities. Women’s contributions are mostly excluded, overlooked, and suppressed in the history presented in public space. Why are there so few monuments for named women in public spaces in Norway?<sup>19</sup> Tromsø has no such statues or busts of named women. *Like Betzy* drew critical attention to the projects of nation building and gender equality as well as to gender perspectives in the art world and society at large. We therefore started asking questions such as the following: Do women actually receive more recognition now than they did in 1880? Who do honorific statues depict, and why? The head of learning and engagement, Ingrid Skovgaard, saw an opportunity to point both to an imbalance in Tromsø’s public space and to draw attention to *Like Betzy*. This was the background for a performative remake of the sculpture of the polar explorer Roald Amundsen.

ill. 7

ill. 8

ill. 9

The polar explorer stands on a pedestal in the park next to the museum, gazing across Tromsø Sound and the harbor area Prostneset, where he launched several northerly expeditions. The statue, made by Carl L. Paulsen and inaugurated in 1937, is a regular stop for sightseeing tourists. Many local inhabitants, especially the older generation, are very proud of the Amundsen statue and the fact that the explorer chose Tromsø as the starting point for his exhibitions. NNKM put Roald inside Betzy’s painting crate and framed him inside Betzy’s reality. Due to the pedestal’s size, we could make a simple square crate that rested on it. The crate covered Amundsen’s body up to his hips and had Betzy’s characteristic flag. From the crate, we hung (with fishing wire) a two-part sign that covered his last name, such that the text on the pedestal became “*Han Roald som Betzy*,” which in informal local parlance means “Roald Like Betzy,” using the “Roald” from the original inscription on the pedestal. On the back of the crate, we hung up a picture of Akerslout-Berg with her painting box, plus a poster explaining why Roald had become “like Betzy” (ill. 9). Han Roald som Betzy The basic idea was to put Roald inside the frame of Betzy’s reality. As a representative of “men on pedestals,” he now had the same conditions as women have lived with throughout history: he had to be expressed through the opposite sex’s framing conditions. We also carried forward the previously-described point about how a female artist’s first name can be used to rob her of authority.

The project group did a thorough evaluation in advance of the performative intervention, both with respect to the statue’s condition and public reactions. The park and statue belong to Tromsø Municipality, which we contacted to gain permission for the intervention. The municipality replied, saying the park and the statue were public, so they did not see the project as anything they could or could not allow. The municipality was criticized in both the press and the city council for having allowed the intervention. The mayor at the time, Kristin Røymo, replied to the city council: “Art should have freedom and be independent and boundary-breaking. If it is provocative, that is also completely fine.”<sup>20</sup> Tromsø Municipality did not intervene in the project.

For NNKM, it was defined as a learning-and-engagement project, but it was called a number of things in both the newspapers and in social media: a work of art, an artistic intervention, a curatorial strategy, a mediational device, vandalism, desecration, and messing with one of Tromsø’s icons. Several very negative comments on the project were published in newspaper columns, in editorials, and in social media. The writers included city council members, the artist Marit Bockelie, the senior regional official Elisabeth Vik Aspark, and many ordinary citizens. The tone varied; some comments were serious contributions while others were short reactions about demanding a prison sentence, general criticism of contemporary art, plus encouragement to commit vandalism (which repeatedly happened).<sup>21</sup> Only to a small degree did the public discussions have anything to do with the exhibition or women in public space; there was a bit of discussion on what art is, so also the role an art museum should play in society. In one contribution to the newspaper *iTromsø*, the author Leif-Harry Hansen asked: “What would the art museum’s director say if someone rigged up a ‘performance’ on one of the paintings in his exhibition?”<sup>22</sup> McGowan answered: “A performance at the museum? Yes please!”<sup>23</sup>



Commotion versus dialogue

NNKM experienced that the painting crate intervention mainly triggered commotion and little fruitful dialogue. Resistance to it in newspaper columns and on social media was difficult to respond to constructively, since it largely consisted of short comments from lots of people and often lacked nuance:

“Gruesomely ugly!!!” (BENTE ARNESEN)

“Totally agree, remove the shit (...) whoever allowed this should lose their job.” (BØRGE JOHAN JENSSEN)

“See that you remove the idiocy of so-called art right away 😏 It is, incidentally, not anywhere near being able to be called art; it is pollution. I am very angry!” (SVEIN-INGVAR PEDERSEN)

“Awful and disgusting. Should be removed!!!” (HARRIET E. LARSEN)

“[...] That director there for the horror is Scottish, after all. <sup>24</sup> He hasn’t understood where he’s landed. Heave them out!” (DAGFINN HOLMANG)

“Why is all this allowed in Tromsø???? No one dares put a stop to it.... there’s an election soon????” (EVA JOHNSEN)

“It’s embarrassing to be female when such things are done.” (GERD SAKARIASSEN)

“Such things cannot continue!!! One cannot let anyone continue in this way!!!!” (EVA JOHNSEN)

NNKM wanted debate, preferably about the questions at the core of Like Betzy, but also about the theme on which the public debate focused. The many who expressed dissatisfaction with the intervention and who used terms such as ugly, unworthy, or disgraceful did not state why they felt it to be so. Our standpoint is that few if any objects in public space are too sacrosanct not to be intervened in or recontextualized. *Roald Like Betzy* was a short-term intervention and a very careful change to the statue’s context, and NNKM believes it was within the bounds of what an open society such as Norway can accommodate. Several viewers disagreed with us, but they were only to a minimal extent willing to discuss it in greater detail.

To be able to talk properly and publicly about the criticism, we organized a debate on July 4, 2019, 19 days after *Roald Like Betzy* was made public.<sup>25</sup> It became clear that few of the critics wanted to participate, neither did the politicians or others with a public profile who had expressed negative views in mass media. The author Leif-Harry Hansen finally agreed to participate as a private individual who was against the project. We were glad for his willingness, and he was a constructive and good debater. Nevertheless, he should not have had to carry all the weight of voicing criticism of NNKM. The same situation emerged when we were to talk about *Roald Like Betzy* on a local radio broadcast (NRK P1): no critics would participate in the debate. Of course, we would have wanted our critics to want to meet us for a public debate; this was one of the goals for the exhibition. Several critics used Norway’s copyright law as an argument against the project, particularly § 5. The right to be named, and protection against injurious use (ideal rights): “A work must not be distorted/alterd or made accessible to the public in a way or a context that harms the author’s or the work’s reputation or uniqueness.”<sup>26</sup> Our evaluation was that the project was temporary and did not change the work itself, only the context, and that we were therefore on safe legal ground. Other people (no one from the museum) contacted the Norwegian Visual Artists Copyright Society about the intervention, but NNKM never received any demand or message from that organization. We experienced that the use of § 5 was mainly a juridical strawman intended to work against the project.<sup>27</sup>



Carl like Betzy

The reactions to *Roald Like Betzy* were strong, but they pale in comparison with the response to *Han Carl som Betzy* (*Carl Like Betzy*). Through an invitation from the Arctic Arts Festival (FINN), we placed another man in Betzy’s shadow: the statue of Carl Gustav Fleischer in Harstad, made by Finn Eriksen and inaugurated in 1950 (*ill. 10*). Han Carl som Betzy

Carl Gustav Fleischer was the highest-ranking Norwegian officer for the Norwegian forces at Narvik in 1940, thus responsible for Germany’s first defeat during World War II. Later on, he was the senior Norwegian general in London, but was, according to some sources, humiliated and in actual fact demoted when he was sent to the USA as a military attaché. He committed suicide in December 1942.<sup>28</sup> For many in Norway’s armed forces, he is an important officer and war hero.

Immediately after we built the crate around the statue, there were strong reactions from politicians and the public, especially from staff and others affiliated with the Norwegian Military. Both NNKM and FINN were heavily criticized. The project was described as vandalism, grave desecration, a humiliation, and ridicule of a war hero. Furthermore, many people had already reacted negatively to FINN’s opening event, at which the artist group *Nordting* announced a sightseeing tour past the homes of Harstad’s richest inhabitants. Late in the evening on July 1, 2019, the crate around the statue was completely destroyed with a 4-way lug wrench by a passing motorist. He saluted the statue twice. The event was filmed from a nearby building that also houses the local newspaper’s headquarters, and the video was used in a report published by the national newspaper *Verdens Gang* (VG). In the comment column for VG’s report,<sup>29</sup> much criticism was voiced, much of it not very serious, but some contributions had more substance:

“It’s unbelievable, the things public funding is used for in this country. The millions burn a hole in the pocket when <FAT BUREAUCRATS> and artists want a party.” (GEIR R. BJØRNSSEN)

“Well done!!! Lots of garbage is erected, presented as art!!” (LEIF VIDAR GULLSTAD)

“So instead of creating sculptures or, in other ways, presenting female artists and talking about their work, time and resources are used to set up a useless wooden crate that actually doesn’t convey anything at all, unless you know exactly what the art museum is trying to achieve. Garbage is easy to throw together; try to make something of full value next time. <Art>, sort of.” (JANNA ÅMODT)

“Totally pathetic. He was a highly respected General!! This clearly is something you do not believe, you who appropriate him for your own agenda, right or wrong. Disrespectful!!” (ØRJAN H. HANSEN)

“If Harstad has so little respect for what General Carl Gustav Fleicher did, then we can move the statue to Narvik, where people got to feel the war on their bodies much more than you art-interested folks in Harstad did. World War II was never about gender equal ity, and it never will be. This project is devoid of respect, it’s stupid, and far removed from reality.” (RONNY SIMONSEN)

Conclusion

With the project *Like Betzy*, we wanted to create a different type of art historical exhibition and activate Akersloot-Berg’s art in a way that would show the relevance of it for today. While the learning-and-engagement strategies (for instance, the interventions and activistive language) challenged the public, they also challenged NNKM as an institution. By directing the criticism inward, NNKM wanted to show how the museum itself is also part of the problem of gender inequality. It is important to increase our knowledge of marginalized artists. One possible solution is to include more female artists in the art historical canon. The question is whether this would create the necessary structural changes in society. Perhaps it is even more important to pursue a confrontational strategy with the power structures and the reason why artists such as Betzy Akersloot-Berg have almost been excluded from Norwegian art history.

Did we succeed in unlocking the power of *Like Betzy*? Who was this exhibition intended to reach? And how did these people respond? Let us first look at the local and general public who were the target group for the exhibition. The hacks in particular generated many reactions and much attention from a broad range of local inhabitants, but it is doubtful whether the strongest critics became more interested in art or in the museum’s activities. Research is needed on this question. It was also important for the museum to create ripple effects in the museum field and in public discourse, especially on themes such as gender, museums, and power structures. The exhibition was nominated for the accolade “The Year’s Exhibition” by the Norwegian art magazine *Subjekt*, partly in order to emphasize critical issues that continue to have great relevance.

It is rare for NNKM to have such high visibility extending over several weeks, as was the case in June and July 2019,<sup>30</sup> but the museum did not see any remarkable change in the number of visitors to the exhibition as compared with earlier exhibitions. *Like Betzy* was seen by more

than 17,000 people, thus fewer than normal for the museum, but the exhibition also coincided with a year of generally reduced visitor numbers on account of the introduction of an entrance fee. Reviews and exhibition critique in the press were generally good, and they were about as comprehensive as for other exhibitions at NNKM. The question, then, is whether the commotion generated by the hacks was valuable for the museum and/or the society. In any case, NNKM did not succeed in using the commotion to draw people into the museum. Given how mass media and the (Internet) public function, it is very difficult and time-consuming to reach everyone, to correct misunderstandings and invite people to come to the museum to form their own opinions. NNKM was unprepared for how fragmented the conversation would be, and we should have had resources at the ready in order to work better vis-à-vis the public, both fans and critics.

NNKM nevertheless has anecdotal evidence to suggest that the hacks and the commotion resulted in many people gaining greater awareness of the museum. The staff often heard statements such as “I haven’t been there for a long time, but I should do something about that.” Still, it is highly doubtful whether we were able to convince people who were skeptical of art from the outset to change their opinion. The museum’s impression from Facebook groups such as “Old Tromsø,” “Old and New Tromsø ♥,” and “Old Harstad,” from comment columns, and other contact interfaces, is that people’s initial opinions became further entrenched. Those who already liked the museum and contemporary art in general liked the hacks, while those who did not like (modern) art in general were strongly opposed to “boxing in” Roald Amundsen. In the local newspaper *iTromsø*,<sup>31</sup> The columnist Ron Røstad wrote about the reception of *Roald Like Betzy*: “So why must there be an attack on [‘most people’] almost every time ‘engagement’ is to be generated? What wrongs have they actually committed? Are there no other people who can

let themselves be provoked in order for the art to be considered successful? One gets the impression that ‘most people’ and the art elites are natural antagonists.” This experience of antagonism was absolutely present during the summer months of 2019 in Tromsø.

NNKM has never before had so much text in an exhibition. We used three languages: Norwegian, North Sámi, and English. To produce so much text proved to be more demanding than anticipated, and we would have done well to have several rounds of proofreading and copy editing before the exhibition opened. NNKM has learned something often experienced in exhibition organization processes: it always takes longer than expected. The museum’s use of activistive language and unfamiliar terminology hopefully lowered some barriers, but, as already discussed, it may also have raised new ones. Ideally, NNKM should reach out to every person in precisely the way he or she prefers, but this is impossible in practice. The project group chose – in this project – to challenge the norms rather than follow safe and well-known paths. All the different layers and forms of information and messages almost killed each other. The timeline, information brochure, map, café corner, postcard station, objects, art, and a boxed-in statue in the park – this was a lot for visitors to fathom in a short time. We have no data on how this new and ambitious learning-and-engagement approach functioned, and in future, it will be important to do more research on it.

*Like Betzy* was an exhibition that challenged the public. If one is to create a learning-and-engagement program that is visible in public space, one also risks criticism and controversy. *Roald Like Betzy* instigated a debate on the place of women in Tromsø’s public space.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, this can be experienced as difficult – because the museum is not initially perceived as a political actor. Nevertheless, we think the museum has a social responsibility to promote gender equality and the dignity of all persons. When the crate around Amundsen’s

statue was removed, McGowan was interviewed by *iTromsø*. “Roald Like Betzy,” he claimed, had made the museum’s role in society visible: “We have a goal of being an actor in society. We must not forget that many people in Tromsø have also been enthusiastic about what we’ve done with the statue and the exhibition.”<sup>33</sup> We also saw how clear actions or statements could have divisive effects and trigger counter-actions that we perhaps were unequipped to tackle. Notwithstanding, we still entertain the idea of intervening in the cityscape in the future. NNKM is well aware that art often causes discomfort, and that art and strategies for the public’s engagement with it cannot lead to change without it being unpleasant for the majority population and the status quo.<sup>34</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The museum foundation consists of four Sámi museums and one Sámi art collection in Vest-Finnmark.

<sup>2</sup> The project also won Tromsø Municipality’s Culture Prize in 2017.

<sup>3</sup> See Betsy Greer, ed. *The Art of Craft and Activism* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Duodji is a Sámi concept involving “craft” making, philosophy, and cosmology. For more on duodji, see Gunvor Guttorm “The Power of Natural Materials and Environments in Contemporary Duodji,” in *Sámi Art and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Svein Aamold, Ulla Angkjær Jørgensen, and Elin Haugdal, 163–177 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Simon, 2010 (first chapter of the open-access online version, *Principles of Participation*, paragraph 3).

<sup>6</sup> Jérémie McGowan was the museum’s director from 2016 to 2020. His vision for NNKM was that it should gather people together, welcome them to engage in dialogue and debate, and shed light on critical issues in society both in the past and the present.

<sup>7</sup> Cross, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> This was a copy of a wooden crate that Akersloot-Berg used when painting outdoors. It includes a bench and an easel. We discuss it in greater detail later in the article.

<sup>9</sup> Scherjon, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Since Skovgaard and McGowan no longer work at NNKM, they were not involved in the writing of this article.

<sup>11</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/badass>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.buzzfeed.com/ashleyperez/seriously-badass-ladies>

<sup>13</sup> Pahlé Bjerke, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/samlingen/produsent/53931/betzy-akerslout-berg>

<sup>15</sup> Charr, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> In 2015–16, Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum received 314 works as a testamentary gift from the art collector and law professor Viggo Hagstrøm (1954–2013). To read more about the donation, see Knut Ljøgodt, Andrea E. Kragerud, Petter Snare (eds.), *Kunstsamlaren: Høydepunkter fra Viggo Hagstrøms donasjon* (Tromsø and Oslo: Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum / Teknisk Industri, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.equalitycheck.it/equalart>

<sup>18</sup> Munthe, quoted in Kokkin, 2018, p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> Herming, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Kristin Røymo, quoted in Præsteng Thuen and Rath Olsen, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> On several occasions, the strings holding up the modified name plates were cut, and on two occasions the name plates were stolen. We ordered new ones and hung them up again.

<sup>22</sup> Hansen, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> McGowan, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Jérémie McGowan is an American and grew up in North Carolina. His father is Irish and his mother is French.

<sup>25</sup> The whole debate is available (in Norwegian) in NNKM’s podcast: <https://soundcloud.com/user-506506748/debatt-har-vi-plass-til-betzy>

<sup>26</sup> The Norwegian Copyright Act, 2018 [https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2018-06-15-40/#KAPITTEL\\_1](https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2018-06-15-40/#KAPITTEL_1) our translation.

<sup>27</sup> The project group also wrote a newspaper article, signed “Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, with Jérémie McGowan, director, Ingrid Skovgaard, head of learning and engagement, and the rest of the staff.” It was published in the local paper *iTromsø*, June 21, 2019. <https://www.itromso.no/meninger/2019/06/21/Har-vi-plass-til-Betzy-19323337.ece>

<sup>28</sup> Read about Fleischer at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl\\_Gustav\\_Fleischer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Gustav_Fleischer)

<sup>29</sup> *VG.no*, July 3, 2019 <https://www.vg.no/rampelys/i/opVGkm/her-knuser-han-kunstprosjektet>

<sup>30</sup> We refer to the time before the museum board’s sudden decision to terminate Jérémie McGowan’s tenure as museum director with immediate effect, without warning or justification, on March 27, 2020. McGowan’s departure generated great media attention.

<sup>31</sup> *iTromsø*, July 24, 2019 <https://www.itromso.no/meninger/2019/07/24/Et-sp%C3%B8rsmål%C3%A5l-om-kasse-jeg-mener-klasse-19557678.ece>

<sup>32</sup> *iTromsø*, June 18, 2019 <https://www.itromso.no/nyheter/2019/06/18/Troms%C3%B8-har-ingen-statuer-av-navngitte-kvinner-19286626.ece>

<sup>33</sup> *iTromsø*, February 14, 2020 <https://www.itromso.no/pluss/eksklusiv/2020/02/14/Her-befris-Roald-Amundsen-fra-%C2%ABBetzy%C2%BB-21089287.ece?rs3675261624538540454&t=1>

<sup>34</sup> *iTromsø*, June 21, 2019 <https://www.itromso.no/meninger/2019/06/21/Har-vi-plass-til-Betzy-19323337.ece>

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# Creative aging programs are successful, but how can they be more equitable?

MOLISSA UDEVITZ

The balance between personal vitality and overall well-being is particularly difficult for individuals aging in Alaska. Limited assisted living facilities force many older adults to age in place out of necessity, and they are often isolated from traditional support networks as younger family members leave the state. These factors, along with the northern climate and high cost of health care, make engaging in creative pursuits and other healthy activities challenging for older Alaskans. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges and further isolated Alaska’s large senior population.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Molissa Udevitz is Youth Program Designer at the Alaska Humanities Forum and was an educator at the Anchorage Museum.

Individuals over the age of 60 comprise about 19.5 percent of Alaska’s population, and according to the Alaska Commission on Aging’s 2019/2020 Senior Snapshot, the state had the fastest growing senior population per capita for the ninth consecutive year.

The Anchorage Museum is uniquely positioned to help increase access to creative opportunities and social engagement for Alaska’s seniors. With training and generous financial support from Aroha Philanthropies, we launched “Vital & Creative,” sequential art workshops for adults 55 and older in Spring 2019. We adapted these workshops to virtual delivery during the pandemic, and both formats have been highly successful.

Each “Vital & Creative” series employs an experienced teaching artist, and participants work on a personal art project throughout the seven- or eight- week series. We have investigated textile arts, movement, book arts, and writing thus far. Each class follows a similar structure: a land acknowledgement, discussion about something from the museum’s collection, brief warm-up activity and sharing, and finally, the majority of the class is devoted to art-making.

## Positive participant reactions

While the Anchorage Museum expected participants would enjoy these workshops, we did not anticipate just how impactful they would be. Participants not only demonstrate personal creative growth but also build confidence, overcome preconceptions about their lack of creativity, and engage in deep personal reflection.

One participant in the virtual movement class was recovering from COVID-19 and reflected, “This class has been perfect to gradually regain strength and confidence in my body. ... I am healing and getting my body back.” Another in the virtual writing class shared how initially feeling overwhelmed with the technology ultimately led to bonding with her grandson, who confided he often felt overwhelmed in school.

Staff assisted with technology challenges, and participants adapted to virtual delivery incredibly well. Virtual classes, along with an accompanying class digital platform, unexpectedly allow participants greater agency over how they engage in the class. They have multiple ways to share their work and a space to continue conversations that are cut short due to limited class time.

## Classes support artists

“Vital & Creative” classes not only serve participants but also support the local creative economy by providing meaningful paid work to a variety of creative practitioners.

We hire experienced teaching artists who are instrumental in developing and leading each series. They have expressed profound gratitude for these opportunities, especially during pandemic-related financial and emotional stress. Teaching artists are grateful for museum staff easing their initial foray into virtual teaching and empowering them to teach virtually in the future.

We also welcome guest artists to provide multiple perspectives and add depth to the artforms. For example, the textile arts class learned about Indigenous practices for preparing and sewing moose hides from Ahtna and Paiute artist Melissa Shaginoff, and participants examined a moose hide jacket from the museum collection with her. In the movement class, Yup’ik artist Michelle Snyder selected dance fans from the museum collection to share with participants and then taught everyone a Yup’ik dance. Guest musicians, including Anchorage Symphony Orchestra percussionist Corliss Kimmel, provided joyful musical accompaniment for several movement class sessions.

Other creative practitioners we have hired include a professional photographer to document classes, a videographer to make a short documentary, and printmakers to design and print original books compiling participants’ poems.

## Institutional benefits

These classes create new opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration as education, exhibitions, and information technology staff have worked together in new ways. We work especially closely with collections to incorporate museum objects into these classes that relate to the workshop themes.

Additionally, “Vital & Creative” classes have led to unexpected opportunities as the community associates the Anchorage Museum with creative aging programming and expertise. A museum staff member served on the board of the nonprofit Older Persons Action Group, the Anchorage Senior Activities Center invited the museum to lead one of their monthly “Age Smart” talks, and the museum led a “Landscapes of Alaska” virtual program series for AARP members.

## Important considerations

Despite the success of “Vital & Creative” classes, the Anchorage Museum is considering complicated questions around diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in these programs. We share these questions in transparency and hope other institutions will join us in adjusting our practices.

How can we dispel misconceptions that these classes are only for existing museum-lovers and reach older individuals who are not already actively involved in our museum? What barriers do we remove to reach new older adult audiences? How do we equitably and sustainably balance our new virtual experiences with in-person programming?

These questions extend to teaching artists. Why do we hire certain teaching artists? How can teaching artists help us work with communities whose culture or language has previously excluded them from museum programs? To help address these questions, we launched a new Apprentice Teaching Artist program in Fall 2021 to support emerging artists and broaden who can teach these classes. We are also developing a future writing class with a Mexican teaching artist who will teach entirely in Spanish, sharing her culture and reaching a Spanish-speaking audience.

Partnerships with other organizations are another way to introduce programming to new participants and teaching artists. We partnered with two different assisted living facilities, which allowed our “Vital & Creative” programs to reach older adults who would not have otherwise participated. However, these relationships unfortunately lapsed due to assisted living facility staff turnover.

This demonstrates the importance of having higher-level institutional support in any partnership. Creating such partnerships takes time and requires a long-range view, which leads to another series of questions about the sustainability of these programs: Will museum boards and leaders support the time it takes to build genuine community partnerships? Once these partnerships are established, how will institutions help sustain them? What happens when grant funding is not available?

Both research and anecdotal evidence supports the benefits of creative aging programs. Museums are essential in providing these types of experiences, but we need to seriously reflect on how these programs can be as equitable as possible. Let us consider these difficult questions together and work to make our creative aging programming more inclusive of our local communities.

## Resources

The Creative Aging Resource: [creativeagingresource.org](https://creativeagingresource.org)

Aroha Philanthropies Vitality Arts resources: [arohaphilanthropies.org/resources](https://arohaphilanthropies.org/resources)

Lifetime Arts [www.lifetimearts.org](https://www.lifetimearts.org)

Dance On Online Festival creative aging resources: [danceexchange.org/dance-on-festival-resource-room](https://danceexchange.org/dance-on-festival-resource-room)

# Change

PATSY PHILLIPS

*During the long healing process, I fell back on my Cherokee ways and adopted what our elders call “a Cherokee approach” to life. They say it is “being of good mind.” That means one has to think positively, to take what is handed out and turn it into a better path.*

CHIEF WILMA MANKILLER (1945 – 2010)  
Mankiller: A Chief and Her People

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patsy Phillips (Cherokee Ntion) is Director of the IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA).

My friend and mentor, Cherokee Chief Wilma Mankiller had many challenges, but she always remained hopeful when serving our people. I look to Chief Mankiller’s wisdom as director for the IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA), especially in times of stress. In my fourteenth year, I am fortunate to serve in this role and grateful to advisors and mentors who have guided me along the way. I respect and honor the museum employees who work tirelessly to produce and manage outstanding exhibitions, programs, publications, and collections. Without talented and committed staff, this work is not possible. For much of American Indian history, non-native scholars have interpreted Indigenous arts, and although their work is important and contributes to the discourse, only Natives know firsthand our cultures, communities and struggles that drive who we are as artists, educators, art administrators and scholars. In this short essay, I will demonstrate through MoCNA’s work how important the Indigenous voice is to the future of museums.

In the summer of 2021, MacKenzie Scott and Dan Jewett announced a \$3 Million unrestricted donation to MoCNA. The MacKenzie group identified the museum as one of "286 Teams Empowering Voices the World Needs to Hear." Scott and Jewett want "to de-emphasize privileged voices and cede focus to other." They believe “people struggling against inequities deserve center stage in stories about the change they are creating....and recognize communities as agents of change.” In addition to the Scott gift, the Ford Foundation awarded the museum \$1.6 Million unrestricted funds in 2020. Ford identified MoCNA as one of twenty Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), calling us "America's Cultural Treasures." MoCNA has joined a prestigious group of organizations. The cohort represents the cultural heritage and creativity of communities that have been historically marginalized, underfunded and under-represented in the narrative of American culture. Ford acknowledges the twenty BIPOC non-profits as vital contributors to the diversity of expression and excellence. The recognition, respect, and funding from Scott and Ford encourage and embolden the staff to visualize and strategize our future. Most importantly, we will continue to represent the Indigenous voice and advance the most progressive contemporary experimental arts and cultural expressions.

*The Exposure: Native Art and Political Ecology* exhibition currently on view is an excellent example of the museum's contribution to the contemporary art narrative and demonstrates our commitment to communicate major issues for Indigenous Peoples such as the destruction of the environment to global audiences. Exposure documents international Indigenous artists' responses to the impacts of nuclear testing, nuclear accidents, and uranium mining on Indigenous peoples and the environment. A

fundamental problem for communities worldwide; the exhibition, publication, and public programs serve as a platform for dialogue among artists, curators, scholars, and activists. Chief Curator, Dr. Manuela Well-Off-Man, collaborated with Indigenous curators and artists from the United States, Hawai'i, Guam, Tahiti, Australia, Canada, Greenland, and Japan, to shape and plan this exhibition and accompanying catalog. Indigenous artists produced work to convey the destruction of their land and the harm to their People. To bring further awareness to this major subject, the exhibition will travel to several venues in the United States.

The Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) and MoCNA are preparing to observe significant milestones in 2022. Established in 1962, IAIA celebrates sixty years, and MoCNA, founded in 1972, marks fifty years. The theme of our anniversary is Making History, as we continue to do today. For our celebration, MoCNA produced a groundbreaking publication that contributes to the field of Indigenous arts and cultures. *Making History: IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts*, edited by Nancy Marie Mithlo, Ph.D., UCLA Professor of Gender Studies was published by the University of New Mexico Press in November 2020.

*Making History* exposes the central role of IAIA and MoCNA as an Indigenous-led organization and epicenter of the dynamic and under-studied contemporary Native Arts movement (1962 to present). This unique resource not only guides educators and the public in how to interpret key American Indian art themes such as the body, dance, and visual icons using Indigenous methodologies, it also charts contemporary Native arts origins, drawing from the wisdom of our elders, artists, poets, and educators. The decolonizing frameworks employed in this primary resource replace prior outdated descriptive and celebratory publications originating from outside Native communities. *Making History* situates the power of testimony, presence, place, and knowledge, as defined by the IAIA, the only tribal college in the nation devoted to the arts whose collections reflect the full tribal diversity of Turtle Island. These essays written by senior Native arts scholars present a best-practices approach to understanding Indigenous art from a Native-centric point of view. *Making History* is an invaluable teaching tool for tribal audiences and an essential resource for all art readers. As the president of IAIA, Dr. Robert Martin says, “this book will enlighten and empower the creative spirit for generations to come.”

As Chief Mankiller suggests, we are thinking positively and moving forward into a better path. Through Indigenous-led directors, curators, and educators, we are altering the way contemporary arts and cultures are portrayed, presented, and understood. We are representing our own cultures – Indigenizing the future.

<sup>1</sup> Native, Native American, Indigenous and American Indian are used interchangeably

<sup>2</sup> Twenty organizations selected by the Ford Foundation as America's Cultural Treasures: Alaska Native Heritage Center, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Apollo Theater, Arab American National Museum, Ballet Hispánico, Charles H. Wright Museum, Dance Theater of Harlem, East West Players, El Museo del Barrio, IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, Japanese American National Museum, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, Museum of Chinese in America, National Museum of Mexican Art, Penumbra Theatre, Project Row Houses, Studio Museum in Harlem, Urban Bush Women, and Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience.

# From Considering a Burn to Into the Light

RIVA SYMKO

When North American artists and critics describe the contemporary museum as a “colonial institution” they are most often referring to its historical roots as a direct tool of the European (primarily British and French) imperialist project. Founded on the collecting practices, organizational principles, and display tactics of German Renaissance ‘wunderkammers’ and eighteenth-century French and British ‘cabinets of curiosities’, but with collecting roots that go as far back as pre-history, today’s museums and galleries are, in Lisa G. Corrin’s words, “places where sacrosanct belief systems are confirmed on the basis of hierarchies valuing one culture over another” from a “comfortably detached position”.<sup>1</sup> It is no secret that public museum and arts institutions operate at a glacially slow pace. Corrin was writing nearly *a decade ago* when she reflected on the resistance of the museum community to facing their own historical, political, and social contexts of operation. This context has resulted in centuries of spoliation, exploitation, commodification, and underrepresentation of BiPOC voices to name but a few of the systemic issues at the root of established museological practices.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Riva Symko is Head of Collections & Exhibitions and Curator of Canadian Art at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

It was armed with this knowledge that, fifteen years ago, I brazenly and, in retrospect somewhat naïvely, stuck my closed fist into the air from my seat in the audience of an unsuspecting museums symposium on the topic of ‘post-colonial exhibiting’ and suggested that “maybe we ought to burn them all down?!” This was not meant as rhetorical, it was not facetious, and it was not expressed flippantly. I was, in fact, dead serious: Maybe. We. Should. Burn. Down. All. The. Museums. The (in retrospect, predictable) response was a brief, haughty incredulity, which I now understand was indicative of the still generally held misassumption that the preservation of material culture housed by these institutions is considered far more important than the history, practices, and effects of the institutions themselves. Instead, I would like to reiterate my original point. If we are not willing to start from the radical point of seriously imagining the potentials and opportunities of a world without the burden of colonial institutions, then we are not seriously imagining decolonization.

The growth of criticism and backlash towards traditional museum and gallery operations owes much to the labour of contemporary artists working within, through, and without the museum since the latter part of the twentieth century. For instance, in one of the most iconic examples of contemporary Indigenous performance art, James Luna, a Pooyukitchum and Mexican-American artist lay inside a display case at the Studio Museum in Harlem with his nude body covered only by a breechcloth. Small white cards with stories describing the origin of several body markings (scars, tan lines, etc.) and written in the third person were scattered alongside the artist’s body. *Artifact Piece* (1987) played an important role in beginning to unravel the power dynamics between the artist, the artwork/artifact, and the museum gallery.

Even more recently, Nigerian-born, Canadian-based artist Chukwudubem Ukaigwe organized a performance intervention by Black friends and colleagues in the *Salon Style* permanent collection display of 16th to 19th century art at the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG). Ukaigwe and the performers came to the gallery as ticket-paying visitors, but instead of playing the role of admiring gallery-goers, they removed their shirts and used instruments, voices, and improvised movements to draw attention the lack of Black representation in the WAG’s collections and staffing. Less than a year after this performance, I arrived at the WAG to take on a leadership role as Head of Collections and Exhibitions. Although I did not witness this artwork myself, as several of my now-colleagues did, the effects resound and reverberate.

Rather, I arrived just under a year before the WAG opened Qaumajuq – a new centre for exhibitions, research, education, art making, and physical home to the world’s largest collection of contemporary Inuit Art. Far from

burning down the gallery, ten years previously the WAG embarked on building a new one. But a different sort of one. At the heart of the WAG’s decolonizing work is the Indigenous Advisory Circle, made up of individuals representing all four regions of Inuit Nunangat, along with Urban Inuit and circumpolar Inuit community representatives from Alaska and Greenland, and First Nations and Métis members from Manitoba and across Canada. These advisors provide leadership and counsel in the development and planning of WAG-Qaumajuq exhibitions, community outreach, and partnerships. In short, it has ensured that Indigenous voices are included at the leadership level of gallery initiatives. As WAG Director and CEO, Dr. Stephen Borys has chronicled in *Journey North: The Inuit Art Centre Project* (2021), the Circle has been crucial in helping the Gallery “respond to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) calls to action to museums and galleries”.<sup>2</sup>

One of the major Qaumajuq projects inspired by this leadership under direct care of my own department (Collections & Exhibitions) is the central interior architectural feature of the new building – the Visible Vault. Every day for three months last year, my entire team of (only) seven plus several hardy interns, moved just under 4000 Inuit sculptures, one-by-one from our basement vault up “into the light” where they are now on-view every day. This is very much a “working” vault. Pieces are often temporarily removed for exhibition, loan, education, research, and conservation. Much of the information from our internal collection database is available to visitors on a series of interactive digital screens, where they are invited to learn more about the artworks, their artists, the communities from which they originate, and to hear the stories of the peoples represented by these sculptures from the perspective of their communities, in their own voices. Each of the shelves were meticulously planned (months in advance of the move) by our Curator of Inuit Art, Darlene Coward-Wight, whose primary goal was to arrange the artworks by community, keeping the familial and ancestral descendants of individual pieces together. This has had the added bonus of revealing the geography of the North, and about the rich cultural diversities found there.

All of the Indigenous artworks in the WAG’s collection – both in the visible vault, along with artworks stored in our traditional vaults, also regularly receive blessings and ceremony in an effort to care for their spirits while they reside on Treaty 1 Territory. Our Head of Indigenous Initiatives, Julia Lafreniere facilitates these ceremonies, led by Elder’s from the different Treaty Nations who offer prayers, blessings, and medicines. Often, WAG-Qaumajuq is wonderfully pungent with the smell of a smudge

happening somewhere in the Gallery. Many of our events in Qaumajuq now also open with a traditional lighting of the kudlik by an Inuk Elder, or incorporate other Indigenous ceremonial practices appropriate to the event and the communities involved.

One of the particularly innovative projects that we have embarked on over the last year in order to address one aspect of the colonial residue that runs through our Collection is a renaming initiative. As with many historical collections of artworks, there are certain works in the WAG’s collection that are culturally inappropriate in today’s context. This could include their subject matter, their mediums, or their institutional cataloguing and titles. The Artworks Renaming Initiative addresses these problematic pieces by incorporating Indigenous knowledge in their retitling. The objective of the ongoing Artworks Renaming Initiative is to give new names to identified artworks with the assistance of Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, and language keepers. Research is conducted around the individual artworks to determine the location and timeframe of the work. The Indigenous Nation featured in the artwork is identified, and an Elder from that Nation re-names the work of art. This project has attracted significant interest from colleagues at other collecting institutions as it is, to our knowledge, the first such initiative of its’ kind on this scale. The project is an example of eschewing conventional collection practices, best-practices, and guidelines in favour of developing whole new frameworks and procedures for the work we do.

All of this challenging and wonderful decolonizing work, *and yet...*the calls of Ukaigwe’s Black performance collective still sing and bounce off the walls of the WAG’s exhibition spaces. We, within the broader museum and gallery community, are still only beginning to scratch the hard, rusted surface of what has yet to be done. There are still more communities to learn from, to build relationships with. The difference in doing it at Qaumajuq is that now my Director, my leadership colleagues, and our staff are becoming visibly less afraid of “saying the wrong thing”, or “doing the right thing the wrong way”, and more resolute in just going ahead and doing whatever we can, however we can, and making up new rules with the communities we serve as we take small steps towards new relationships. We remain ever cognizant of the responsibility that comes with the Ojibway name gifted to the WAG by a group of Indigenous language keepers and elders – Biindigin Biwaasaeyaah – meaning, “come on in, the dawn of light is coming”.

<sup>1</sup> Lisa G. Corrin, “Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves”, *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Second Edition, edited by Bettina Messias Carbonell, Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2012, 329.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Stephen Borys, “A Journey North”, *Journey North: The Inuit Art Centre Project*, Winnipeg Art Gallery: 2021, 99.

# Cold Hands

CRISTINA LLERAS FIGUEROA

Its 1.30 am, the world embedded in darkness. I haven't slept much at the base of the mountain slope. It's the excitement, or the cold, or the air at an altitude of 4.800 meters above sea level. Luis, my guide, wants to get a head start. There is a pretty rocky path that he would like for us to cross first, before other mountaineers. I like the fact that his instructions are simple. Short steps, constant rhythm.

We start the climb on sand, then rocks and finally snow. I cannot see the peak of the snowy mountain. We make a few stops along the way to catch our breath or to put on gear. We come across signs with information on how the glacier has shrunk since the 19th century installed by National Park's system. As we climb, we see that the second part of the 20th century represents the greatest loss. I am reminded that other Colombian glaciers are also disappearing.

On the glacier, I concentrate on the steps and the terrible cold I feel in my hands is distracting me, taking my attention from the experience of being here to the individual discomfort of pain. I keep on stepping on the rope knotted to the safety harness, something I have been told to avoid. The walk becomes more slanted and other tools have to be used. I am just walking, moving forward not aware of how time is passing by.

I am on this mountain because I wanted to find silence. The kind that acoustic ecologist Gordon Hempton describes as the absence of noise. I focus on my ears. The sounds on the glacier are our steps on the snow, the wind, even the cold has a sound. On the immense moorland I have crossed there are the sounds of water: rain, fog, clouds. An occasional bird perhaps. This land can also be described by the sound of the mules that carry luggage, the dogs that herd them, cows, pigs and domesticated species that tourism has brought here.

To get to the glacier Luis has guided me through crossing different ecosystems: foggy forest, high Andean forest, moorland and super moorland. All in a span of a couple of days. The diversity of plants and birds as I go up lessens. But up on the mountain is the birth of the rivers that sustain such diversity. When I walk down I get a second chance to feel how the ecosystems are interconnected and how they feed off and collaborate with each other.

Suddenly Luis says, "we have arrived". We are at the summit at 5.30 am, looking humbly at the sunrise from 5.215 meters. I am on the mountain top. Other climbers are arriving, all of us satisfied. Each person takes a different lesson from this experience. For some, it's the individual goal of "hacer cumbre", "making the summit", an interesting expression, as though the summit is only there if we can walk on it. For others it's team work, solidarity and reaching the summit together.

My own learning experience is about being a better listener. Since the beginning of 2020 I've come to these nature trips to learn. To learn from rivers, from rocks, from mud, from other travelers. I have seen and experienced in nature much of the teachings of different religious systems discussed in popular culture. I think of water as the greatest teacher.

As much as I wanted the sublime moment of being on the summit, I was reminded over the course of my journey to the peak that no corner of the world is left untouched by the climate crisis begun decades ago. Whether it's the places where nature serves as a backdrop for selfies, or silent moorlands, our relationship to the natural world continues to transform it. On these trips I am able to see first-hand humanity's direct impact on the environment, regardless of whether we are completely conscious of the climate and social crisis or totally aloof and have turned our back to reality.

It's a paradox then. By knowing the natural world we alter it. The pandemic has alerted us about what should change in our anthropogenic conception of the world. Though I am less optimistic about structural changes, smaller transformations might occur. One of opportunities is to develop a different relationship (non-extractivist) with nature. But that would also entail inventing a form of tourism that results in the smallest impact possible. On the camp where we stayed before climbing, I saw remnants of previous visitors; toilet paper and used face masks. It is not enough to interact with nature if we don't also develop the tools to listen and to care for those particular worlds, even if they do not satisfy our own needs.

We would need to follow Luis' instructions more closely: use small steps so that we might hear and look at what we are stepping on, the worlds that we are crossing, and be grateful for it. The walking process and its rhythm reveals the magnitude of the mountains and gives one a sense of one's imperfectness in an interconnected system, of being invited, of being a foreigner, of not owning the landscape. To walk with greater environmental awareness is to be aware of one's own footprints.



Luis stands in front of the 1960 glacier sign. Photo by author.

MY MARK:  
MY CITY

# Camel to Salmon:

## *A Journey in Food from Somalia to Alaska*

S. HOLLIS MICKEY

“Food is important because it will tell you about the people who live in the place,” says Mahdi Akal. “You will learn about the environment, the culture.” Akal has lived this insight throughout his remarkable journey from his home country of Somalia to his new home in Alaska, where he has lived since 2014.

Akal’s 14-year journey from Somalia to the 49th state spans six countries and two continents. His is a journey from refugee to U.S. citizen, a journey of profound resilience and accomplishment. It is also a journey from hearty bowls of stewed camel and goat meat to bowls of salmon and local greens.

Mahdi is currently Educator at the Anchorage Museum where he shares his knowledge and experience with wide audiences. He brings resilience to his work, teaching learners of all ages how to experiment and problem-solve with the resources at hand.

Akal’s journey began in a small village in south Somalia. He grew up raising sheep, goats, and camels, and growing corn, sugarcane, and rice. When asked Akal what home tasted like, he smiles, and immediately describes a specific dish: goat meat stewed with brown rice, and a mix of what Akal calls “Somali spices:” cumin, coriander, black pepper, fennel seed, and turmeric. Toasted and ground freshly, these aromatic spices add richness to the umami flavor of the goat meat, and those flavors are absorbed into the rice that makes up part of the dish. The goat came from animals he and his father and brothers tended. Akal eagerly also describes dishes made with camel. The Akals’ camel herd provided milk for the family, and, for important occasions, meat. The herd was a special point of pride. As Akal says, “In Somalia, if a person owns camels, we look at him as a rich person because we know the camel is a big deal in Somalia. We don’t have camel meat unless it is a wedding, or big celebration, or holiday, or a very important guest.” The Akal family had a large farm in Southern Somalia, producing enough crops, camel milk, and animals to sell in larger, nearby communities.

#MYMARKMYCITY #SEEDLABANCHORAGE

The Anchorage Museum’s Seed Lab, an experimental space focused on creative approaches to sustainable communities and climate change.

Akal was just 12 years old when his homeland was ravaged from open war. The proliferation of violence in Somalia led Akal and his family to flee to safety over the border to Ethiopia, where they stayed for three months. Akal recounts how that brief time introduced him to new lifeways and foodways: “The food was very spicy.” But, Ethiopia’s escalating involvement in the Somali conflict meant that the Akals had to cross borders again, this time to Sudan. There, Akal was immersed in the Arabic language, in which he is now fluent, in addition to English and his mother tongue of Somali. The taste of Sudan offered new flavors, in particular white corn. Hand-ground white corn flour was used to make asida a thick, porridge-like dish that Akal now makes for his family with corn flour purchased in Anchorage at Fred Meyer.

The Akal family’s time in Sudan was short-lived. Without appropriate papers or passports, they were hardly situated to build a new life there for themselves. They heard the UN office in Libya might offer an opportunity. The Akal family found reprieve there for just three years, until the Arab Spring began.

Forced to relocate, the family crossed the northern border of Sudan into Egypt, arriving in Cairo. “Cairo is a big city, so you will see people from all the Arabic regions and they all have their own restaurants.” He eagerly speaks about Egyptian spinach (*Corchorus olitorius*), a green he was first introduced to in Cairo. When cooked, the leaves release a thickening agent, as okra does, which adds body to soups and stews. In Anchorage, he buys frozen Egyptian spinach shipped all the way from Alexandria, Egypt, and grows it in the Anchorage Museum’s Vertical Harvest hydroponic unit. He led a two-hour workshop on the growth and use of it, at the Anchorage Museum as part of the Urban Harvest class series which connects contemporary Alaskan lifeways and foodways to their histories and contexts.

While Akal loved the flavors of Cairo, the city was challenging for his family. Following January 25, 2011, the Day of Revolt, violence ensued, with Cairo at the center of unrest. But Akal’s family had no papers and had nowhere else to go and remained in Cairo until 2014.

Then, opportunity: “Thankfully, the email came from the United Nations that said, ‘You are going to Anchorage, Alaska.’” While the Akal family was eager to finally leave behind violence and unrest, but they knew little of Alaska. “I knew there was a place called Alaska, but I didn’t know that Alaska was

part of the United States. I thought it was separate.” Akal says, laughing, “The worst part is, I told all my friends I am going to the south, to a place near Mexico, where it would be hot, because I didn’t look at pictures of Alaska. And, everyone I talked to believed it.” A friend clarified geography. “I had to go back to all my friends and tell them. And also tell my mom. So, we were worried about living in the U.S.” The prospect of the cold, unpeopled lands, which his friend had described, in what Akal and his mother had already heard, to be a country with an unfavorable environment for practicing Muslims, concerned Akal and his family. Ultimately, Akal and his family decided since they had moved so much, if Alaska was not a good place for them, they could just move again.

And so, Akal and his family made the long journey from Cairo to Anchorage. Akal smiled: “there are people who live here, and schools, and shops, there are restaurants! So we liked it. My family liked it. And, so we are going to stay in Alaska for a very long time.”

When asked him what his new home tastes like, he immediately said, “SALMON” which he roasts with his special Somali spice blend. In Alaska he tried radish, avocado, and mushroom for the first time. But, with all the new foods to be tried and had in Alaska, some favorites prove harder to find. One food in particular, was important to Akal and his family to find in Alaska—camel meat. The shop owner of a local halal market calls Akal for pickup when the order shipped from Australia comes in for special occasions.

Upon arriving in Alaska through Refugee Assistance and Immigration Services (RAIS), Akal became involved in Fresh International Gardens, a project which supports immigrants and refugees gaining practical farming skills for Alaska. Now, Akal and his family have a weekly farm stand. And, Akal has helped the Museum make a strong partnership with RAIS and establish the Museum as part of Welcoming America. The Museum now provides family memberships to RAIS clients and supports them with tailored programming.

Akal was naturalized in January of 2020. Now, a U.S. citizen, he has freedom to travel back to Somalia which he will do in October 2021. He promises to bring back more stories of the rich flavors of his homeland.

And in addition to his museum work, Akal is thinking of the future. “I have a dream that one day I will have a big farm in Alaska. I know camel will not survive in Alaska, but...”

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# MAHDI'S SPICE BLEND

The Akal family uses this spice blend in a variety of preparations. Mahdi recommends it on salmon, or if you can get it, goat meat.

## INGREDIENTS

*1 teaspoon cumin seeds*

*1 teaspoon fennel seeds*

*1 teaspoon black pepper*

*½ teaspoon ground chili pepper*

*1 teaspoon whole coriander seeds*

## PREPARATION

Mix all ingredients and place them in warm cast-iron. Heat it on a low temperature and continuously stir roughly until fragrant. Remove from the stove immediately. This process will take about 2 minutes. Blend the mixture using a spice grinder.

# THIS IS DENA'INA ELNENA

## ANCHORAGE IS DENA'INA HOMELAND

Land Acknowledgment is a formal statement recognizing the Indigenous people of a place. It is a public gesture of appreciation for the past and present stewardship of land you and your organization occupy. Land Acknowledgment opens a space with gratefulness and respect for the contributions, innovations, and contemporary perspective of Indigenous peoples. It is an actionable statement that marks our collective movement towards decolonization and equity.



ANCHORAGE MUSEUM