MUSEUM

FUTURES

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beyond the vitrine, across the street and with the security guard
Museum Futures is a transdisciplinary journal and platform for research on the dynamic ways a museum can perform.

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Cover by Angela Jennings. Image from the Treasures from the Metropolitan Museum of Art Zine (p. 5–6), Marble statue of the so-called Apollo Lykeios and found paper, 2014

Note: Many of the selections included in this issue of Museum Futures are excerpts. For the full articles visit museumfutures.org
Dear Reader,

While the conception of the museum is ever evolving, it still ricochets between a sacred place for preserving artifacts from the past, and a future-leaning civic space where new meaning and knowledge is produced. As an editorial team we were interested in exploring the peripheries of the museum and to consider how practices pioneered by those outside its thresholds could inform its future.

We asked contributors to look toward the overlooked and varied spaces of museums: the street next to the museum, the entrance and lobby, the coat room or bathroom. We asked contributors to question what museums could and should be: a hub, a school, a memory holder, an architectural experiment. We also asked contributors to consider the people that interpret and maintain museums: the art handler, “outside specialist”, café worker, security guard, conservator, visitor, curator and educator.

During the winter and spring of 2016 we received a range of artworks, writings, and speculations. We were struck by the ways contributors flexibly responded to old and often brittle infrastructures and systems through exploring pedagogical, political and spatial possibilities. It’s important to note that the selections included here are excerpts from longer expositions. We encourage you to visit museumfutures.org to browse the articles in full, and to lend your voice.

Finally, we hope you’ll share your ideas for what museums can and should be. Send us a #yourmuseumfuture

Love,

Kate, Pablo and Chris
power, privilege + idealisms

In conversation with Kerry Downey, transcript by Christopher Kennedy

Chris: I wonder if you could talk about your relationship to museums, and how you got started as an educator at the MoMA.

Kerry: I was working at a nursing home and was asked to take an older woman named Eve, who was in a wheelchair, around to cultural sites in New York City. The family encouraged me to take her to places that I was also interested in, to make it mutually beneficial. So we went to MoMA and the MET a lot. I worked with her for six years and we went to museums that I didn’t even know I was interested in before like the Museum of the City of NY. We would travel from the Upper East Side to the Brooklyn Museum using Access-a-Ride. We were very committed.

In trying to develop conversations with her at museums, inadvertently this meant I was trying to make museums accessible, both physically and socially. I was having to articulate my passion why we were there, what we were looking at. I have been developing affective labor skills around art since I was in high school -- I worked one summer at a Senior Center. This long term caregiving deepened my patience and gave me space to hone in on my own passion for talking about art and using art as a model of being with others. MoMA hired me based on some of these experiences. I think I got really lucky because I had no museum experience, never studied education, and had very little teaching practice. But I think they recognized that I have some qualities that are innate and hard to teach, skills I’ve inherited or absorbed having grown up with parents as teachers.

Chris: Can you talk about social practice - its relationship to your work, and experience with the community partnerships program at the MoMA?

Kerry: Social practice has had a huge influence on my community partnership work, particularly my conversations with artists and curators who are also educators and interested in these overlaps: Douglas Paulson, Hatuey Ramos-Rermín, Elizabeth Hamby, Natasha Marie Llorens, Shellyne Rodriguez, Caroline Woolard, Robert Sember, Cassie Thornton, and my collaborative work with Flux Factory and Action Club. A few of us were discussing “Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship,” a book by Claire Bishop that investigates socially engaged practices, questioning the emancipatory claims of participatory art. I found and still find this book to be a useful guide to the laying out
the myriad problems involved in community-based collaborations. I have come to have a more complex understanding of the entangled relationships between aesthetics, ethics, and institutions. I've also come to believe that there are no artificial hells. Instead, what you have is a continuum of spaces that do and do not feel safe to experiment and try out ideas, spaces where you can and cannot make room to challenge difficult topics like structural oppression or insecurity. Sometimes these spaces contain both, and are in a kind of tension. Perhaps this is a major difference between making art through MoMA with vulnerable populations and creating situations as an artist. There are different stakes and certainly very different relationships to power. I look for ways to build trust, acknowledge difference, and create space for listening and play. At the same time, I'm not believing in my ability to emancipate others, this is very dangerous thinking that undermines the work and reinvests in hierarchical relations, a performance of my privilege. I'm simultaneously disinvesting in idealisms -- I try to be very realistic about what is possible.

Most importantly, something that social practice has taught me is to try to keep the questions or problems close. What is it that am I doing when I develop art projects with "underserved" communities? What does it mean that I'm a white person visiting so many communities of color? What does it mean that I’m a middle-class, liberal arts-educated white queer going to a East New York’s transitional housing program for trans-folks? What skills, forms of care, forms of attention can I offer than are genuinely desired or needed? At its best, art offers extraordinary flexibility to bend around needs, desires, materials, different forms of time and space, etc. I work to bend the shape of art, education, and “MoMA” to be able to offer something of myself to a group of people. What “Artificial Hells” and social practice at large continues to make me wonder, is how can this work create space for radical pleasure that’s not an empty container for impossible longings. I believe in the value of generating hope, but it’s a thing that has to come from within a process that is collaborative and shared.

I have learned that the bottom line of what it is that I’m doing is 1. sharing MoMA’s resources (art supplies, the collection, the classrooms) and 2. Sharing myself (my time, skills, passions, and experience). 3. Creating social and artistic experiences that make space for sharing ideas and acknowledging difference. I’ve learned is not to pretend I’m part of a community; a community partnership is with a community- but does MoMA or do I get to be part of that community? I don’t know. Maybe. Sometimes. Over time? If at the end of the partnership when people hear “The Museum of Modern Art,” if they feel slightly warmer towards the idea of a museum, that’s great. But I’m not proselytizing museums and I’m not proselytizing MoMA or modern art. If anything, I can get down with being an ambassador for art. [...]
This question has two readings: the first, does dance belong in the collection of a museum? (And, as such, can it be owned, preserved and archived in the manner of objects?) and the second, give reasons for choreographing and performing in the museum as a site.

The first is a trending question for museums - as dance is moving from auxiliary programming to commissioned work such as Miguel Gutierrez’ latest Age & Beauty Part I for the Whitney Biennial and choreography-based exhibitions such as Table of Contents with Siobhan Davies Dance at the ICA London. The MoMA recently acquired time-based works and invited dance and performance artists to respond to the exhibition in Performing Histories: Live Artworks Examining the Past, and collaborated with choreographer Boris Charmatz to produce the program, Musee de la danse: Three Collective Gestures. The Hammer Museum in Los Angeles recently had an installation of Trisha Brown’s Floor of the Forest as part of Trisha Brown Dance Company: The Retrospective Project, and upcoming at the Walker Art Center, a mini-festival called Composing Forward: The Art of Steve Paxton.

Perhaps the embedded question is, what are the intentions of a museum to collect and present ephemeral, time-based work? On whose terms will dance be preserved and archived? And what exactly is it that is being collected - a score? the rights to perform the work? To illustrate, Trio A, an important work of modern dance history by Yvonne Rainer, is entrusted to the body archive of 5 dancers trained by Rainer as the only ones who are officially allowed to teach it. [...] What a museum might do is to continue to play a part in supporting works of dance by presenting, hosting and commissioning works, and then leaving the performance in the care of the artist or a committed community. The museum could provide space for rehearsal or research, as in the case of Andrea Geyer’s residency at MoMA, resulting in a commissioned video installation, Three Chants Modern - which examines the museum as an institution of time and then uses movement and video to question its form, authority and structure. [...]
In the site of the Museum where movement (of people and of objects) is highly regulated by a strict code of what is permitted and what is not permitted by owners and artwork contracts, by architecture and curatorial decisions, through guided tours and art history -- I am asking, can dance rupture existing systems and reveal what is possible? Can it shake habits and open doors? [...]
memorandum on museums of curiosity + wonder

Richard Pell

I am the founder of a small museum that focuses on the intentional, hereditary changes that human beings have made to the living world. Everything from the domestication of dogs more than 10,000 years ago, to the present moment of synthetic biology. The Center for PostNatural History exists so that people can wrap their heads around this idea and discover some questions that don’t have easy answers. I don’t know what those questions are, that is up to the visitor. And I certainly don’t expect that they will find any answers while perusing our museum. We are just the first stop on the journey; a signpost at the entrance to your very own rabbit hole. The point of visiting our museum it is to leave a little hungrier than you arrived. It is a concept that shares some common ancestry with the first museum in the United States. Charles Willson Peale’s American Museum was founded in 1786 as the first public institution in the United States to consider the general public as a valid audience for the cultivation of wonder and curiosity. It brought together fine art and natural history such that the visitor was, “led always from familiar objects toward the unfamiliar... into the mysteries of life”. One of Peale’s foundational specimens was the first complete skeleton of a mastodon to be exhibited anywhere in the world. The mind-blowing nature of this creature, at the time, cannot be overstated. So little was understood about this prehistoric wonder, that it was exhibited simply as “The Great Incognitum” or The Great Unknown. When was the last time you visited a science museum and were shown something so new and incredible that science was at a loss for words to describe it? And yet, isn’t this is the experience that we want to have? To arrive at the bleeding edge of what is knowable and gaze over the edge into the unknown and ask a question without feeling dumb.

Recently I was invited to put a few words together about the role that museums play in regards to curiosity and found myself struggling to clarify the difference between two concepts that in the past I have used virtually interchangeably. For years I’ve blurred or ignored the distinction between wonder and curiosity. I often champion them both as a bedrock goal, in contrast to more
traditional, quantitatively focused assessments that are measured by knowledge acquisition or learning outcomes. However, when I tried to split the difference between wonder and curiosity, I realized these are two very different characters. In fact, if “Wonder” and “Curiosity” were people, they would have issues with one another.

The two clearly spend a lot of time together, hence the confusion. And they look quite alike on the surface perhaps they are siblings? If so, I suspect Wonder is the older of the two. Wonder generally describes the emotional experience of encountering something truly unexpected and amazing. Wonder is associated with a childlike way of thinking. Wonder yearns for richly novel experience and when she finds it, doesn’t want it to end. Wonder is an ecstatic state of completeness. It requires no further information. There are things Wonder would rather not know. In fact, if Wonder had her way, we probably wouldn’t be having this conversation.

The Bible is littered with “wondrous” miracles, from self-igniting shrubbery to extraordinarily efficient lamp oil. The Wonder that they inspire is an entirely appropriate response to the experience of encountering an omniscient God. In this sense, Wonder is a complete experience. The architecture of cathedrals and temples does nothing if not inspire wonder. Its function in part, is to chase away any doubts about who is in charge. It is cathartic rather than cerebral. From Day One, the Biblical God advises his two initial followers to steer clear of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Children raised in the Christian tradition who ask too many questions are provided with the cautionary tale of the “Doubting Thomas”.

Curiosity, on the other hand, does have some doubts. Cautious skepticism may be what separates Curiosity from Wonder. Curiosity always wants to know more and is willing to risk disappointment to achieve this end. While Wonder has its eyes respectfully closed, Curiosity is peaking. Wonder was perfectly happy to visit the Emerald City and behold The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, while Curiosity pulled back the curtain revealing the truth. It is worth noting that the character who exposed the fraudulent wizard was neither Dorthy, nor any of her anthropomorphic companions, but rather her tiny dog Toto.

Curiosity and Wonder also have something in common. The unexpected is what propels them. But, Wonder wants to hold onto the experience: “Don’t ruin it” while Curiosity takes the risky next step by asking, “Why is it that way?” Curiosity thinks that Wonder is naive. Wonder thinks that Curiosity is a buzzkill.

I think they actually need each other. Without an appreciation for Wonder, Curiosity IS a buzzkill. Left to its own devices, Curiosity would conduct an autopsy on the family cat just to find out how it works (pun intended). And without Curiosity,
Wonder would still be staring up at the stars, satisfied that it is the center of the universe. Curiosity hates to admit it, but Wonder tells great stories. Wonder pilots flying reindeer and surreptitiously delivers video games consoles to middleclass kids. But one day, Curiosity kills Santa Claus. It had to happen eventually. Wonder WAS being naive on that point. In a sober moment Wonder might admit that Curiosity, in this case, exposed a greater truth: Most parents would do anything to make their kids happy.

At this point, it probably sounds like I am describing the difference between art and science, or science and religion, or rationality and nonrationality, or leftbrain and rightbrain, and surely there’s plenty of overlap. But I am also describing the inseparability of those things. It is only in the last 150 years or so, that we formally separated these worlds to the point where there are scant few places that attempt to engage both Wonder and Curiosity on equal footing.

Museums have evolved a great deal in the 180 or so years since their first generation collapsed in financial ruin or adapted into the more lucrative P.T. Barnumstyled collection of freaks, oddities and hoaxes. Following the necessary injection of funds from the megawealthy industrialists of the late 19th century, museum collections gained a stunning degree of rational order and quantitative analysis. They subdivided into seemingly unrelated institutions of art, science and history. They also acquired the monumental architecture of cathedrals and temples. The Great Hall in the National Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C. with its colossal taxidermy elephant and adjoining halls of knowledge inspires nothing if not wonder. It is a truly incredible space. But perhaps in the effort to impress the public with how much they know, they created a space that makes it harder to ask “Why?”

I’m not suggesting that the modern science museum is the Great and Powerful Oz, hiding behind his curtain. But I am suggesting that it has erected an edifice of similar proportions. What if, today, the National Museum of Natural History opened a hall dedicated to specimens and artifacts that are not well understood? Call it “The Hall of Incognitums.” They might risk visitors wondering about the “wrong things.” Visitors might risk being disappointed or frustrated. Competing narratives might develop that call the validity of the whole project of science into question. And meaningful answers to our deepest questions might emerge from unexpected places. It all sounds very risky. Is anyone else curious how it would all play out?

in search of social relevance

A nyone who has kept a close eye on museum work over the last few years will have seen many institutions having great difficulty carrying out to the full all the duties expected of them. Fortunately, there are still some dazzling examples of those who have indeed succeeded in bringing us impressive work but, sadly, these remain the exception. We cannot be beguiled by new and repeated reports of record visitor numbers. Only a handful of museums and galleries achieve these records and fill their spaces with a broad audience. Attendance is falling year after year.

For many of the medium to large museums it seems that the gap between the inward-facing areas of work (research and training) and outward-facing tasks (communication and entertainment) is becoming too great. Fulfillment of the ever-increasing demands in just one of these fields alone presents many museums with significant challenges (especially in view of the current resourcing environment). Fundamental differences between the various beneficiaries and target groups mean that the demands behind every area of work also differ.

There are some astonishing examples of ‘succès d’estime’ whereby some institutions really consolidate their position in society but this happens all too rarely. As a result, the municipal museums lose not only visitors but, above all, their social relevance. And it is now the middle-classes who barely ever make their way to a museum for they see the contents as not of any contemporary relevance and the ‘visitor experience’ as boring. As long as this section of the public stays away, it is actually irrelevant whether this criticism is accurate or whether it is simply a matter of prejudice. [...]

In contrast to a German museum model passed down over the years, an open and participative institutional organisation is characterised by a museum management comprising not solely its director but an enriched leadership involving others. In the model underpinning this arrangement, the Director is positioned at the centre of the organisation. He, or she, leads and takes responsibility for the organisation’s activities and is the final operational authority. In addition to the director are representatives from both the funding body and the museum management community. The funding representatives ensure that the museum is financed in a way that corresponds to its objectives and also share
responsibility for ensuring that the activities of the management team are oriented towards the agreed objectives. The representatives of the community are more firmly tasked with a shared, shaping role such as bringing in new ideas. A shared responsibility also lies with them, in particular that of ensuring additional resource and support from beyond the museum’s immediate environment.

A special feature of this participative institutional organisation is that task completion is not organised within the museum according to a hierarchy. It’s more about supporters who are bound up in the museum’s ‘cosmos’ and who lend their own support to the fulfillment of tasks. As well as the now obligatory ‘Friends of’ group, this ‘cosmos’ also comprises a network of interested parties and this includes universities, tourism associations, municipal marketing offices and so on. Museum staff play a coordinating role which also includes quality assurance. They bring together aspects of various tasks, namely those which are not directly worked on in the museum itself, to form a whole and to ensure a level of performance suited to a museum.

This broader management works to the objective of varied ideas and multilayered influences being taken into consideration when shaping the programme. But in order that the museum’s capacity to act remains safe, it is essential that the management focuses its ideas and adopts a shared agenda. The tasks, roles and responsibilities are also determined here.

Involving a broader range of people in the management process will, in the most natural of ways, bring to ‘new target groups’ a greater currency and relevance.
the pain of the summer venice tourist

Paloma Checa-Gismero

At the time of this writing I am regaining awareness of a long vanished body. Except for a week, about two months ago, I had not felt my body much for two years. My brain, a bureaucrat, had been inputting, classifying, adding and formalizing; it got achy and now was time for the garbage compressor to switch on and let my skin resurface again, like in the long past days of good-feeling. The bureaucrat had been filling files on the practices of display, preservation, and arrangement, on the issues of access and exclusion, on the naming of objects and practices, and on the analysis of their impact on untouchable surrounding meshes. It had been memorizing and loading to the stack millions of foreign retellings that, with their copy got somehow inscribed in my brain's lipid structures—and lost too. And so my brain had forgotten that kind of pain that grows from the soles of your feet into your calves and knees, that then climbs the vastus medialis and the rectus femoris, clings to one's hamstrings and at last evenly settles in both but cheeks and the lower back. These cramps that I'm feeling now is what feels like to be exposed to art for the length of a day, walking between countries, stopping to read, sitting to watch, standing and stopping and walking and stopping and sitting to read. Plus it's the itching of the mosquito bites from the lagoon. And the boredom. So somehow in my study I forgot about the tourist's tedium, because it is maybe the blind spot that keeps my sources necessary. It may be possible that we all forget it when we're writing, as we've long ago stopped, and we're at home on a chair, with good lights and a mug of coffee on our left on the desk.

Most climate change predictions for the next century agree that precipitations will intensify but shorten, floodings will be more frequent, and less water will drain into the soil. Temperature differences between summer and
winter will rise, and the average regional will go up 3 degrees centigrades. The rise of sea level is at this point unstoppable. And at the end of the show there’s the seasonal potlatch inside the old warehouse, with millions of images stamped in surfaces — which I’m too exhausted to see. It’s the big stormy authored display of the summer, wrapped in cultural postcolonial winds. Singers perform the grand finale, announced more than one hundred years ago in a political economy treaty. And they read from the book, which they grind and erode as their Bible. This will be the last big display of power, the last storm until the next intake, two years from today. It is the evening now. Twinges on my back. Very little of what I see and read makes it to the loaded stack of memories.

panoramic inquiries
Sara Velas and Kate Clark

These postcards are a series of exchanges between artist Sara Velas, the founder of the Velaslavasay Panorama, and Kate Clark, artist and Museum Futures co-editor.

Drawing on the illustrious history of the great panorama paintings of the 18th and 19th centuries, The Velaslavasay Panorama is an exhibition hall, theatre and garden dedicated to the production and presentation of unusual visual experiences, including those of the 360-degree variety. Inspired by the panoramic tradition of the 19th century and romanticist painting, the Velaslavasay Panorama (V.P.) is a major work of immersive landscape that transports the viewer to another reality using technologies and traditions that were precursors to cinema.

The Velaslavasay Panorama brings attention to the aesthetic and imaginative value of art forms that have faded since the birth of cinema. Anchored by immersive panorama paintings of the 19th Century, the Velaslavasay is dedicated to the production and presentation of unusual multi-sensory, immersive experiences with a focus on early cinematic phenomena.

Since its founding in Los Angeles in the year 2000, the Velaslavasay has housed the only 360-degree panorama viewing hall in the West. Located in a former tile layers union meeting hall, The Velaslavasay Panorama can be found in University Park in the West Adams Historic District of Los Angeles.
Arriving to the palace for the first time,

and wondering, what kind of a union is this?

UNION.......UNION

VELASLAVASKY PANORAMA

Twilight gatherings where people and plants mingle

in hoes and cornfield.
Arriving to the Panorama for the first time, and wondering, what kind of a union is this? The Velaslavasyay Panorama is so unique, and yet it is part of a centuries-old tradition. What is your sense of this relationship? - K.C.

The Velaslavasyay Panorama exists to create something immersive - in one instance specifically through the panoramic medium (i.e. the 19th century Robert Barker definition of a panorama) - but also generally through every aspect of what is being presented and created. All details matter, nothing is neutral (whether intentional or mistaken). The objects left out (or put away) when visitors come to visit. The tone of voice and experience of receiving a ticket at the front desk. Typography, printed materials and correspondence. The flavors presented and the sense of light. Smells and the activities beyond the fence or on the street. In a sense, assisting the visitor into playing out a miniature moment of theatre, though they didn’t always realize that is what might be happening. In the early days, on Hollywood Boulevard, I was most often the person greeting the visitors. The ambiguity of the place created a different or unknown set of expectations. There was a pizza sign. There was music playing. There was a sense of dirty abandon on that section of Hollywood Boulevard. Confused tourists, mislead by early 2000’s web postings of “a motel on Hollywood Boulevard,” encountered a series of discount stores, Armenian grocers. Though having its roots in an 1890’s century medium, a present day application shifts to a different context. Blah blah Velaslavasyay a meditation on tourism and semi-emburse of anti-authoritarian-non-high-art. That’s an old story, though, that tension between high-and-low art. Exquisite art often happens unintentionally. Intentional art isn’t always exquisite. Sometimes people asked me “well, its art, though, isn’t it?” It sounds a bit extreme writing this out, but there’s a layer of using nostalgia as a medium, playing with historical memory and the invention of something that isn’t there. That’s in part the illusion, the desire to exist between something that is real and something that is beyond real and something that would never or could never exist or those moments when truth is stranger than fiction. Visions in the world that are too strangely beautiful or existentially uncanny to feel as if they’ve been pulled from cinema. In this realm, the well I draw from is deep and murky - something I don’t actually want to pin down in a few succinct phrases. An essence which sustains the core ideas and general thrust of things. A philosophical opposition to explaining or dictating an experience. Hoping to simply create the experience and offer it, allowing for different interpretations and the added experience one comes to it on. A few times, I suppose I’ve not been the ideal interviewee because folks would ask me “Now that you’ve done this, what would you like to have happen?” Getting at a higher pinpointed truth or “secret meaning.” My genuine answer is that I want to keep working on it, tending to it and aligning its growth - similar to a garden (and also literally a garden). Our small Velaslavasyay team of collaborators enjoy working together very much and, though spread thin through logistics, pulled in multiple directions of obligation with and extremely limited resources, much like a happy ship of folks travelling the seas together on a strange small rickety boat hoping for new discoveries and created experiences.
What does a center for the pre-cinematic arts offer to people in 2016? — K.C.

These things and entertainments — “popular before the invention of film” — can still hold interest & intrigue yet shift, of course, in the present day. Of course many want to draw a line between the medium and the message. But the medium/message are always intertwined, yet these two things are not always the same in a different context and time period. An 18th century German novella can hold significance for an American reader of today but this “meaning” or resonance is very different now in 2016 than when it was written in 1774. And yet, not really. But yes, quite different, but still connected. Or not. Maybe the translation has changed everything anyways. Again the textbook answer: the traditional aspect of things offers contrast to the attention span and media of today. Actually, more often this is a manipulation or reframing of things perceived as traditional. Doing things with a very tactile nature and sensibility. Sensation, immersion and non dependent or physical experience in the world around us. It’s possible a lot of this stems from a yearning for tradition and cultural anchors. "Pre-cinematic" is merely one layer in this project. Sometimes, this reference point is the shorthand for those inquiring about “What exactly is really going on here?” The Velaslavasay Panorama has taken on its own character, personality and navigational course — this is what steers the ship as much as anything. I’ve more recently stopped myself from saying “Pre-Cinematic” (instead saying art forms popular before the invention of cinema) since this type of linear framing of B.C. (Before Cinema) and A.D. (After Digital) makes things very hierarchical. Why must everything be “leading up” to the moving image? Implying evolution that everything is always higher upwards stronger better improved. But a lot of times, it’s simply change. Exchanging one thing for another.

Maybe that bird couldn’t run very fast but boy did she have beautiful feathers. Extinct? So the new variety is fast fast fast, but blandish brown feathers. Aside from the pre-dating of cinema, a huge component of the things which fit under the umbrella of the Velaslavasay offer a meditation on illusion, and the spots in between a suspension of dis-belief and full awareness of the suspension and playing along with the act. Sometimes, mistakes are made — both intentionally and unintentionally — which fulfill these criteria. Entertainments and art forms that are focused very much on illusion. Sometimes, this is cinema too. But film, moving image, video, movies, TV, etc. — there’s so very much of it now in many varieties. Drawing people’s attention to the early days of cinema and before can sometimes remind us of when these early moving pictures really felt magical. Cinema now a days can certainly feel magical, but its less connected to technology. No, I take that back. There are many recently made tools that can be used to make films more magical. It’s impossible to imagine an alternate universe where film was never invented, but it would be interesting to see where things would be now a days with art and entertainment. Contemplating what could have been — is that what we’re creating and presenting? (Maybe that’s a part of why I’m so obsessed with North Korea as a comparison of North and South like alternate universes. I realize that’s a problematic statement) And yet some of the project’s significance is heavily dependent on a psychically whispered conversation with the history and development of cinema. Its reference point is (in part) a world where cinema exists and has deeply impacted us and more specifically Los Angeles — the showcase city which developed itself as a backdrop, both physically and conceptually, historically and in the present day.
letra museum mixtape  
Juan Obando

Museum Mixtape is a video-album in which up-and-coming rappers perform improvised freestyle rhymes as live critiques of museums in the southeast United States. The piece aims to create a playful connection between hip-hop narratives and institutional art spaces, reflecting on the current state of cultural economies, institutional community engagement and emerging subcultural forms and their intersections. Below is an excerpt from rapper Absalute:

Absalute: Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, NC

Alright, rise and grind y’all
Welcome to Chapel Hill, North Carolina
We’re at the Ackland Art Museum
We’re actually here at the Contemporary Art department
I’m gonna give you a quick walkthrough

Look, my name’s Abs
You talk about the best, you gotta mention me
I snuck into the back of the museum
I skipped the fee
Contemporary means it pretty new, essentially
So no DaVinci, see, it’s all from this century

Some of this Art isn’t very understandable
Here’s a painting of a naked woman, with some animals
I mean, let’s move on
What we got next, man?
This looks like Charles Manson with a sex change

I know these artists are on their grind, like the X-Games but this painting here stinks like sweat stains
It annoys me like road blocks, so I gotta move on
I won’t stop
And this next joint is so hot
It probably writes rhymes, it’s a robot!
It looks like it does everything but roll pot
I blow guap, my lifestyle’s exciting
Google Images has way better lightning

Picasso Baby, it’s art eh way Abs raps
and this next joint is cool because it’s “abstract”
But this next joint, I say it’s objective
It’s clearly childbirth from the baby’s perspective

Maybe I’m wrong, I know it’s not a Monet
You thought it was just us? Well, here’s the big homie
Look, if I made this you all probably laugh
This dude looks like Shrek on a body cast

Where’s the exit at? Am I warm or cold?
I’ve seen better artwork from a 4-year old
But this next joint? I’m kinda loving this
You could put it in your room and it will hide your ugliness

An MC with a Hammer and you ain’t touching this
I’m balling, but this is too expensive rug to get
If I was wealthy, I would put it on my dad’s floor
but this the type of rug you pay a hundred stacks for

A master of my craft, I’m no apprentice
The game needs me like this devil needs a dentist
I’m just playing
I really kinda truly, though
would probably would put this big thing in my studio
I’m just playing
I say these things to get a laugh
And I can see the picture when I’m stepping back
I had fun and I think they saved the best for last
but time is money so I gotta hit the exit fast

museum as folk

Growing up, I recall visiting 3 museums: The Brooklyn Children’s Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Natural History. For each one I remember boarding the yellow school bus and racing to the back to sit with the cool kids. Visiting Museums was something I was excited about but only happened occasionally via school field trips, as I now realize our teachers who all lived in Long Island Suburbs probably wanted to provide us
the experience and knowledge of other worlds outside of our own. Of course it was always a fun time, but I never grasped the essence of what type of experience museums provide for the people, or maybe I just didn’t understand what it provided for my people.

One of my recent struggles has been pretending to be museum cultured but actually not having the same experience and exposure as my peers. Museums were not readily available to me in my neighborhood growing up. One would tell me that at my current age and ability, I have the opportunity to explore different museums and become well versed in the experiences that I’ve missed out on. My response to that person would be, I’ve had no choice but to try to expose myself to museums however, my ability to understand them, absorb the information and be inspired by the artifacts is disabled.

Presently, I try to attend museums when I can. I don’t attend as many as I probably should because I am intimidated and overwhelmed by the material. At this point it would be helpful to learn how to interact with the pieces and information the museums offer but presently, we still have no "beginner" museums in my community. Ethnic communities are currently going through what everyone likes to call gentrification. Generally there is a change in scenery, more housing developments, more stores that have replaced age-old mom and pop shops.

Based on the idea that museums are numerically more present than Mc. Donald’s and Starbucks combined, there should be a plethora of museums to choose from as I travel my streets. We have few positive outlets in our neighborhoods that empower us to learn more and develop, to have the capability to stretch beyond our communities to understand the cultures of others. In a nutshell, we never were given the opportunity to dialogue with our own heritage and culture so how can we know how to dialogue with others? Part of the responsibility of a museum in my opinion is to serve as a remote replica of the essence of a group’s culture and experience. Without museums in our own community
we cannot properly voyage these replicas of the world. With culture and history absent in the home, in the schools, in the communities, what institution is left? For my children, I am relying on museums of the future to help me educate them on the culture that I’ve never fully grasped. I’m relying on museums to be the folk storyteller who sat fireside and entertained people with stories of the past. I am relying on museums to tell the stories grandparents and great grandparents belt out when they reminisce on how life used to be.


treasures from the metropolitan museum of art

Angela Jennings

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded in 1870 in New York, NY. It’s the largest art museum in the United States with the permanent collection containing more than two million works from around the world. Throughout the Met’s 144 years of existence it’s been the museum guard who’s been entrusted with the extensive responsibility of sustaining safety for the people, galleries and the art. Guards experience the complex duality of being placed on the bottom of the wage and social spectrum, while given the fundamental authority as “guardians.”

The guards’ position at The Met requires one to be quietly aware at all times, demanding continued physical and mental strength. A few of the duties include reporting to one’s assigned section and post, standing, surveying, directing and informing visitors and staff, communicating with the dispatch office, and memorizing the museum’s layout, specific artworks, events and shows. Despite the numerous appointed tasks, the job functions largely in states of monotony.

In most cases guards spend the majority of the day standing on their feet, in their own minds without interruption; a type of cerebral numbing zone. Many counteract this zone through sketching or writing on small pads of paper, completing crossword
puzzles, and even learning new languages through the use of small flashcards hidden in their hands. There are also those who seek to memorize every art piece and detail found within specific galleries.

Some guards speed up the presence of time by activating the rule of “no backpacks on backs” as a strict mission, keeping their eyes and bodies alert and approach every visitor breaking the rule. Yet, there are others that let this rule slide and tend to focus their eyes on the figures and faces of the visitors, and either discuss their thoughts with team members or keep their views to themselves. And there are those who pass the time keeping their spirits high by singing songs within.

Throughout my duration of working as a security guard at the Met, I too attempted the majority of these strategies. Yet, most days the numbing zone took full effect.

It was during this time that I started to observe not only the people and art, but the small lost remnants of being left behind on the gallery floors. While on duty I began to take on the role of an archaeologist, this duty gave me more to contemplate.

Towards the end of my first month on the job I saw the first relic; it was located on the floor in the middle of gallery 169 - Art of the Later Roman Empire: Third Century A.D. The Met describes this gallery as demonstrating changes in social and artistic trends that emerged during the later imperial period. Displayed in the gallery are marble sarcophagi, which replaced traditions of cremation and attest to a shift in culture. As I picked the relic off of the floor its form became apparent, it spoke to that of the human figure. The relic was composed of two main features including a red round bead and an elongated jade-
like bead, attached together with yellow string suggested the form of a head and torso. In this moment of finding a continuum of embodiment arose, encompassing the absent bodies that once rested in their sarcophagi, the figurative jewel, its previous owner, the visitors and myself. For the next 5 months I continued to search and scan the museum floors and collect relics, which I now sincerely think of as treasures.

I collected over 100 treasures from the museum, most of which are just a few centimeters wide including sequins, washers, beads, dust, earrings, buttons, and objects that are too abstract to be given names other than what seems to be their material makeup. I developed a cataloging system to preserve the order and safety of the objects by placing them into plastic bags that were then labeled according to the week from which the treasures were found.

Currently I’m in the process of developing a photo book entitled Treasures from The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The treasures will be photographed digitally referencing the photographic strategies applied by the Met. Each object will receive its own page and will be ordered by implementing the cataloging system I developed based on chronology. Some of the treasures have also been digitized allowing for the possibility of printing replicas from bioplastic using a 3D printer.

Through these gestures I intend to preserve and present the treasures in the most pristine way. These small artifacts of human existence found within The Met attest to the histories formed between life, art and the institution. The collection illuminates sets of constructed hierarchical functions within the museum, including the social standing and significance given to security guards along with the material relationships found between the treasures and The Met’s permanent collection.