

MUSEUMS MOVING FORWARD

MMF Convening: Exhibition Program Decision-Making & Resource Allocation

August 30 2021
12–1:30PM EST

ATTENDEES: 17

SPEAKERS: Lauren Haynes, Claire Ruud, and Marie Vickles

- I. INTRODUCTION AND GROUP AGREEMENTS
- II. PRESENTATIONS

Lauren Haynes is the Patsy R. and Raymond D. Nasher Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. Prior to joining the Nasher in June 2021, Haynes was Director of Artist Initiatives and Curator, Contemporary Art at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and the Momentary in Bentonville, Arkansas. Haynes led the curatorial team for *State of the Art 2020*, the second iteration of *State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now* (2014), which opened at both Crystal Bridges and the Momentary in February 2020. Haynes's recent curatorial projects include *Kenny Rivera: The Floor is Crooked* (2021); *Crystal Bridges at 10* (2021); *Sarah Cain: In Nature* (2021); *Crystals in Art: Ancient to Today* (2019) and *The Beyond: Georgia O'Keeffe and Contemporary Art* (2018). Prior to joining Crystal Bridges, Haynes spent nearly a decade at The Studio Museum in Harlem. As a specialist in African American contemporary art, Haynes curated dozens of exhibitions at the Studio Museum and contemporary art institutions in New York. Haynes was a 2018 Center for Curatorial Leadership fellow and a recipient of a 2020 ArtTable New Leadership Award.

Lauren: Who is your audience? Who are you trying to reach?

The intersection of community and audience is impacted by the museum's mission and location. Studio Museum: Harlem; Crystal Bridges: welcomes "all" (should);

Nasher: Duke community first, working outwards to the larger community.

Crystal Bridges pushed to have shows aimed at engaging indigenous populations, such as *Soul of Nation* and had a program to give stipends to artists of color.

Tools of Measurement/Success

- Crystal Bridges has a team devoted to exhibition publicity.
- Strong collaboration between marketing dept and community engagement dept.
 - Considering what images we use to communicate and the surveys that get distributed.
- Take in-person surveys -- determine where visitors are coming from.
- The Research and Evaluation team works closely with the Curatorial.
- Nasher: has a sign-in book
 - Asks for visitor zip codes (metrics).

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- Asks for comments to gauge exhibition interest and enjoyment.

Issues

- Selective tracking, e.g., Only surveying interest in BIPOC shows. Why does this only happen with exhibitions that feature POC? Why silo it to things that are only focused on people we are afraid won't come?
- Decision-making process: curator proposed but ultimately decided by the director.
- Budget pressures: the bigger, broader-interest shows get more funding because they will attract larger crowds and make more money. (Less of an issue at Nasher.)
- Will work to encourage the Nasher to intentionally allocate percentages of the museum's budget to non-male, non-white artists to ensure equitable shows.
- Why are we only checking boxes with people of color and not thinking more holistically about all audiences and aspects across the board?

Claire Ruud is Director of Curatorial Strategy at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, where she is responsible for the integration of curatorial vision and organizational planning. She oversees the departments of Visual Art, Performance and Public Practice, and Learning. She leads the internal task force on Social Belonging, and in 2019, she co-chaired the development of the MCA's 2020 - 2025 strategic plan, which identified revelatory art, social belonging, a generous and inclusive welcome, and equity as the Museum's priorities. Claire serves as Treasurer of the Board of Directors of Threewalls, a contemporary art space in Chicago's Humboldt Park, and is a Business Role Model for the Forte Foundation, supporting women in business. She was previously Deputy Director of the Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles and Associate Director of Fluent~Collaborative in Austin. She holds a Master's in art history from the University of Texas at Austin and an MBA from the Yale School of Management.

Claire: Increasing the diversity of voices — internally and externally — in exhibition programming

It's crucial to understand the difference between actual audience versus aspirational audience. MCA conducted a big 2019 audience research study in tandem with a strategic plan process which now needs to be updated to reflect the changing times.

Three types of audiences to consider:

1. Current (work with marketing).
 - a. 35% Local, 50% National and 15% International. About 55% identified as female; 35% were 18 to 24; 3% were 25 to 34. Between 50% to 60% percent of our audience is white.
2. Aspirational (work with curators).
 - a. Their audience would demographically reflect the city of Chicago.
3. Partners and Stakeholders.
 - a. Come up with an exhibition and choose partners based on the

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exhibition.

Six Hats System

- Department heads hold 4 meetings/year to discuss 3 ideas for future exhibitions and address “Opportunities and Challenges.” Implemented the Six Hats System to work through “turf wars”:
- Everyone “wears the hat” of other department heads to consider the show from multiple viewpoints.
- Encourages informed decision-making.
- Staff Involvement:
 - They invite narratives to describe additional ideas and collect diverse views and voices.
 - A staff survey was organized focusing on issues of social justice.
- We used a closed nomination system to nominate artists and the three senior curators made the selections as a jury and chose the artists.
- Enabled them to see what their staff was thinking about and created transparency in the decision-making process.

Budgeting

- To create equity in resources she is in favor of creating standardized budget caps for types of exhibitions, although there are some exceptions.
 - Caps are put into place, then curators and programs write what they want to do above the cap. The leadership team evaluates everything all at once.
 - Eliminates competition and allows for biases.

Embedded Engagement Model

1. Engagement is sustained.
2. Mission alignment with partners.
3. Engagement begins before exhibition ideas are formed.
4. Curatorial expertise is respected.

Community Partnering

- Have partnered with community groups for several years:
 - These advisory relationships are formally contracted with MOU and paid.
 - Selected them with upcoming institutional and programmatic priorities in mind.
 - 3-year ideation phase.
- Currently meeting with three core community advisory groups: Puerto Rican Arts Center, Bodies of Work (differently-abled group), and The American Indian Center
 - Talk through issues that might lead to the generation of exhibition ideas.
 - 2 advisory meetings/year.
 - Groups are asked, “What will be the most important issue for your

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group in the next 3 years?” Museum is tasked with creating synergy between community goals and the museum’s shows.

- Focus is on consultation and dialogue—not a co-curatorial model. The advisors are not asked to do the labor of curators.

Marie Vickles is the Director of Education at the Pérez Art Museum Miami and has worked in various roles within the museum’s Education department since October 2013. In her work as the Director of Education, she administers programs that directly serve over 100,000 youth and adults annually. Marie has organized arts educational programs, workshops, and exhibitions across the United States and the Caribbean for over 15 years and maintains an active practice as an independent curator producing over 30 exhibitions and curatorial projects. Her curatorial work includes the co-curation of several exhibitions, most recently *Dust Specks on the Sea*, Little Haiti Cultural Complex, Miami, FL (2019), and she is currently the Curator-in-Residence at the Little Haiti Cultural Complex (LHCC). Marie completed her studies at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, and Florida State University, which includes degrees in both Visual Arts and Public Administration. Marie currently serves the City of Miami as a board member of the Arts and Entertainment Council.

Marie Vickles: Community is everyone that’s not inside the museum. The Pérez brands itself as The People’s Museum—the goal is to reach and attract every single person. Some people will always visit the museum; big-name exhibitions are “the breadcrumbs” that draw less-frequent visitors. We are here for everyone and can provide something that relates to everyone in a way that is relevant to individuals in different ways. Curators bring critical scholarship, research, and passion to the table, but what she would like to see more of is to hear and understand more about who the audiences are that the curators are thinking about. Some curators say they are curating for the industry / for other curators. As an educator, she feels that if a visitor comes in and isn’t impacted in some way then is it work worth doing?

Tools to Build Community

Surveys

- The Education Dept conducts regular surveys but not everyone reads them. There are a number of other surveys currently underway:
 1. External audiences.
 2. Internal, for a 5-year strategic plan.
 3. Endowment campaign (in reset mode).

Education

- Your Budget = Your Value Statement: The education budget at the Pérez is 100% devoted to the public.
- All programs are offered to the public.
- Always thinking of ways to involve all audiences (e.g. arts community/

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- children/ youth/seniors).
- Constantly reaching out to community stakeholders via unofficial advisory groups throughout the year.

M Files Portfolio Review

- Program designed by a museum fellow, Naomi Guerrero, based on an old MET program.
- Artists were invited to meet with curators in person.
- Curators enjoyed themselves and it brought in artists from the local art community—it broke barriers.

Looking Ahead

Employ Best Practices to Ensure Full Staff Involvement

- Have a series of meetings to intentionally discuss the exhibitions with key stakeholders across the museum, highlighting different areas: education, security, and development. etc.
- May be painful, but very important.

Less Focus on “Moneyed Circles”

- Collection-owning board members and donors are a constant challenge. They still call the shots, in many cases and museums operate as country clubs. (What is my agency as an educator?)

V. DISCUSSION

Quotas

What would a quota system look like? Are there other ways to achieve the same results?

- Have to consider who is making these decisions: there was concern that quotas would give institutions an “out” to get away with doing the bare minimum and institutional change wouldn’t occur.
- Would be good to see it in practice, to discover if they actually work. Would probably reveal that museums aren’t doing as good a job with representation as they believe.

Community Input/Community Advisors (posted to Claire)

Are staff members satisfied with this style of the decision-making process? Has it changed the culture and calls for transparency?

- So far. It is made clear at the start that the chief curator makes the final call, thus protecting the artist and curatorial decisions from interventions.
- Everyone is kept well-informed; there isn’t some secret backdoor meeting where things are overridden.

External Community Advisory Partnerships and Programming

- Can’t have too many.
- Sometimes, the community group wants to change the rules. Have to negotiate carefully and clarify goals with artists and community groups.
- Have to shift the concept of “community” away from the stereotype of Black and Brown people.

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- Museums are under pressure to attract BIPOC folk but additional funding has not been provided to make this happen.
- Have to remain in touch with BIPOC organizations beyond specific exhibitions, e.g., an attendee noted that their museum's community advisory group are only asked to weigh in on BIPOC shows.
- Curators, especially curators of color, are often tasked with community outreach prior to shows but they are not necessarily qualified to locate the people/groups they need to work with.
- Curators are not always good communicators and fail to respond to inquiries from community partners.
- Competing factions within a community may call for a different approach, e.g., conducting one-on-one conversations ("Coffee Conversations") with community members and reporting back to a civic engagement team.
- Who runs the advisory group? Are they content with the status quo? Have to avoid the "silo" approach and include a variety of voices.
- It is helpful to have the Director of Communications involved in the discussions.
- Each advisor works on a specific aspect that is integral and works on both programmatic and systemic work in the institution.

Internal Community Issues

- Front line museum workers—Facilities and Security Depts—need to be included in programming discussions, especially if they are representative of the local community.
 - e.g., an attendee noted that their museum's Facilities, Security and Education Depts have more racial and sexual identity diversity.
- Control of budgets. E.g., an attendee noted that their museum's Education budget was moved from Exhibitions to Public Programming.
- Important for Marketing Depts to be involved in community engagement meetings so they can address the correct populations when they promote the exhibitions.
 - e.g., ensuring that tickets are readily accessible for target audiences.
- Civic Engagement Dept should reach out to contacts that curators have collected over the course of exhibition development.

Research

Are internal and external research equally respected?

- Internal people have a more informed perspective of the inner workings. Need staff (individual or team) dedicated to collecting data.
- External research needs to be conducted with the aspirational audience in mind to effect change.