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Editorial

Museum Education: Multiple Perspectives

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Introduction

We might call this issue a pandemic offspring. Initially, colleagues and I received federal funding to conduct a study of teacher education student learning prompted by interactions with artworks at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. We had barely got started when the pandemic forced the closure of the museum and drastically altered our teaching and research strategies. Our study depended upon interactions with actual artworks (not digital reproductions), extensive in-person group work, and flexible scheduling, so it became immediately apparent that our original plans were not going to work. Rather than trying to redesign our study into something we felt would be a pale version of the original plan, we decided, instead, to invite museum educators to write about their current work; and we would publish the papers, in one format or another. This issue is one result of that call for papers. It provides an overview of educators currently working within the contexts of their particular and varied connections to museum education, and from many parts of the world.

This issue contains eleven articles divided into five sections. Links will be apparent, not only within sections but from one to another. Where the goals of the author(s) signal a somewhat different direction, I have inserted a new section. The first section, articles 1 & 2, address primary education specifically. The second section, articles 3 & 4, take a more global view of museum education, although article 3 does also prioritize primary education. Section 3, articles 5 – 7, look at museums where art is not the primary focus. Section 4, articles 8 & 9, return to a focus on art museums, but for purposes unlike those addressed in the earlier articles. The final section, articles 10 & 11, look at equity and related issues from quite different standpoints. At the risk of over-simplifying, here, I will provide a brief overview of the articles.

Section 1

The first article introduces a project developed at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. *Learning-to-learn-with-a Boon Wurrung tree*, by Geraldine Burke et al, tells the story of a multi-institutional art/research/teaching partnership between a museum, a university teacher education program, a local indigenous dance troop, and is centered on an exhibition, *Tree Story*. Thus, while the focus group is early primary school children, they also introduce ecological issues and indigenous contributions to educational understanding. The article thus braids together cross-institutional arts-based learning collaboration, pre-service teacher education, indigenous knowledges, and more-than-human subjectivities.

The second article, a photo essay, *Conversations with rain: proposing poetic and non-linear interpretation strategies in the art gallery*, by Lilly Blue, Jo Pollitt and Mindy Blaise features another location in Australia, this time in the west of the country. The article describes a

multi-platform, multi-disciplinary, and multi-generational partnership between the Art Gallery of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University's School of Education. These authors too address indigenous ritual, environmental concerns and more-than-human pedagogies, working with young children in a gallery setting. The authors adopt a non-didactic model of teaching that acknowledges the multiple abilities and interests of young children, as opposed to thinking of the child solely as a learner. In their work with young children, they base their strategies on five key concepts.

Section 2

The third article is somewhat of a transitional piece. While it does focus on the education of very young children, it also points to wider applications, which are taken up in later sections of this issue. *Museum mindfulness' as space, place, and provocation: Supporting global development, community, and identity in early childhood*, by Sheryl Smith-Gilman, is not geographically specific. Instead, Smith-Gilman borrows from the Reggio Emilia approach in thinking of the museum as a provocative “third teacher”, one that fosters holistic (global)—social, emotional, cognitive, physical, linguistic, aesthetic—growth toward young children's understanding of their self-identity and place in the world. While Smith-Gilman acknowledges the learning potential to be found in any museum—science, dinosaur, etc—she does prioritize art museums. Her concern is to draw children's attention to the complexities and ambiguities that artworks embody, and to foster mindfulness through playful art activities. She demonstrates this with reference to her teaching and research examples, one of which, coincidentally, draws attention to the particularities of an olive tree. Like the authors of the previous two articles, Smith-Gilman endorses the importance of shared philosophies and institutional practices.

Attention to the sharing of philosophies and practices is carried forward in the fourth article, *Socially engaged pedagogy in the zoom age*, by Janet Lee, Michelle Antonisse, and Alice Bebbington. The article widens the focus to K- 12 art education that takes place within Contemporary Art Start, an award-winning school partnership program at the Museum of Contemporary Art, in Los Angeles. The program involves 45 schools, 7500 students across all grade levels, and 150 teachers annually. The museum staff train the teachers in Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) so that those teachers can carry their new skills back to the classroom. The training is supported by multiple museum visits, hands-on practice, curriculum study, and family involvement opportunities. This large undertaking was challenged by the onset of the pandemic. The authors describe how their program works, what changes the pandemic necessitated, how, for example, the move to zoom classes created a whole series of questions, examination of goals, strategies, and new opportunities.

Section 3

The fifth article, *A space for [a]culturing authentic aesthetic sensibilities* by Attwell Manvuto and Biggie Samwanda, moves away from a focus on artworks while maintaining one on aesthetic sensibilities and their place in experiential learning in schools in Zimbabwe. That is, as in the previous articles, these authors explore how teachers, students, museum curatorial and education staff can collaborate to foster experiential learning, in this case, on the topic of cultural heritage. The sites they work with are the Mutare Museum of Transport and Antiquities, the Museum of Human Sciences, and the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe. In addition to drawing attention to artifacts that, in the daily lives of students, tend to be taken for granted, the chosen museums also bring to the fore the ritualistic practices of Zimbabwean indigenous groups. Thus, the subject of their inquiries is more appropriately referred to as visual culture, as opposed to art. Nonetheless, they borrow from the aesthetics component of the American 1990s Discipline-based Art Education (DBAE) approach to art education in their emphasis on aesthetic engagement, and subsequent to museum visits, students are introduced to art making practices.

The sixth article, *Visualizing peace museums: A historical reflection and culture-based exploration*, by Kimberly Baker, likewise features Africa, this time, Kenya. As the title suggests, the museum focus in this case is on peace. Cultural artifacts do have an aesthetic quality, which is valued by the groups who produce them, but the emphasis here is on their instrumental value in promoting peace, both within an individual community and, importantly, with neighbouring communities. Kenya has had a sorry history of inter-ethnic conflict, often the result of misguided colonial policies. Baker begins her article with an overview of efforts to develop peace museums across many parts of the globe. Baker notes, for example, that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, 74 peace museums and related institutions were established in Europe. But the key figure in Baker's story is Kenyan ethnographer, Sultan Somjee. Since the mid-1970s Dr. Somjee has worked tirelessly to promote inter-ethnic peace through, not only his development of small community museums devoted to the cause of peace, but also through partnerships with NGOs, exhibitions and his writings. Because Dr. Somjee also has a background in art education, he also saw artifacts denoting the varied indigenous material cultures as vehicles for reconciliation. These became the focus of the individual museums. Somjee intends his work to counteract the colonial-based education system and to valorize living indigenous traditions.

The seventh article, *4213 cigarette stubs: An ineffable display of people and things*, by Ismail Ozgur Soganci, is another essay that addresses the topic of material culture, this time, the culture of 1980s Istanbul, Turkey, as depicted in Orhan Pamuk's 2008 novel, *The museum of Innocence*. In 2012 a small-scale museum opened in Istanbul in which objects discussed in the novel were now put on display. As Soganci notes, "...it is not easy to identify whether the

museum's exhibits are references to the text or vice versa." Whatever the case, the museum does capture the essence of Istanbul during that time through its collection of objects—even the cigarette butts purportedly smoked by Pamuk's fictional main character. Pamuk insists the stories of ordinary people provide insights into what it means to be human. Soganci sees the museum project as an avenue to more holistic educational practice.

Section 4

With the eighth and ninth articles we return to more traditional museum venues, but with different users in mind—still education oriented, but education for a very specific purpose. In the eighth article, *Cultivating an embodied interpretive consciousness; Health humanities initiatives at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts*, by Jiamen Xu, Marilyn Lajeunesse & Melissa Park, the article describes a partnership between McGill University's Faculty of Medicine and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' (MMFA) education unit. The article begins with a description of two programs offered by the museum for medical students, one for the University's undergraduate *Physician Apprenticeship* elective, largely focused on "deep seeing"; the other for the graduate students *Narrative Rehabilitation* initiative offered through the University's occupational therapy department. Then Xu provides, through use of a narrative phenomenological lens, a case study in which her hermeneutic skills are put into practice.

The ninth article, *Meaningful engagement with an art museum collection*, by Charmaine Zamut, describes three museum outreach programs at MUZA, the national art museum in Malta, aimed at three different communities of young adults—residents in a drug rehabilitation center, students enrolled in a Bachelors in Art Education (B.Ed) course, and inmates at a correctional facility. What all three groups had in common at the beginning of the projects was that they rejected the idea of museum visits. They felt they were not appropriate visitors to a museum. The author set out to disabuse the participants of this restrictive mindset as she engaged them in reflections on themselves and their lives, facilitated through interactions with artworks. Those interactions included the making of artworks. These helped participants build confidence in their capacities for meaning making and expressing their own narratives.

Section 5

The last two articles address issues of inclusion and related matters within gallery/museum settings. In article ten, *The gallery art hive as a metaphor for diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives*, Natasha Reid describes her time as director of the Visual Arts Center (VAC), a local non-profit institution that combines an art school, a gallery, and a community art education program. The Center is located in Westmount, a city within the larger metropolitan

area of Montreal, Quebec. While a fairly wide cross-section of the population live and work there, the neighbourhood is generally thought of as affluent, largely white and predominantly Anglo-Saxon. Members of the Center pay fees for their activities. Reid sought to change the public's perception of the VAC as a place of privilege to one of diversity, equity and inclusion. To that end, among other innovations, Reid introduced a free-access Art Hive activity in the Center's art gallery at the conclusion of every exhibition. The article is an account of that effort.

In the last article, *The Euphronios Krater: Exhibition, stewardship and public trust*, by Rika Burnham, the author provides an overview of the history of this famous Greek vase, as far as it is known, how it came to be in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art (Met), its return to Italy in 2008, and what is lost and gained by all concerned with this restitution. Burnham notes that there are no obvious solutions to the complex moral and civic issues raised by this story, but that complexity is the very reason for increased public voice in searching for equitable solutions. In the main body of the article Burnham assumes a first-person voice that encapsulates the observations and reactions to this vase voiced in her presence by the thousands of visitors to the Met over the course of thirty-five years. In doing so, her love of the artifact and deep knowledge of ancient Greek lore become apparent.

About the Guest Editor

Boyd White (Ph. D. Concordia University) is Associate Professor in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, McGill University (retired as of Aug 31, 2023). Teaching and research interests are in the areas of philosophy and art education, particularly on the topic of aesthetic engagement, both within and beyond institutional boundaries. While his particular focus continues to be on the visual arts, Dr. White is broadening the scope of his research into the other arts areas as well, such as in fiction and poetry and their potential to inform and respond to visual culture. Dr. White is the author of numerous journal articles, has chapters in various texts, and has authored, co-authored or co-edited six books, including *Mapping Reactions for Holistic Learning: An Introductory Guide to Aesthetigrams*. Peter Lang. Co-author: Amélie Lemieux (2017).

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