

**The Public Work of Care:
Emerging Art Curatorial Community Engagement Practices**

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Abstract

Public programming, community outreach, visitor studies and education departments have been central to discussions in the art museum field about strategies for community engagement. However, little documentation is available of the ways in which art curators today see their practice as actively participating in and even generating creative strategies to propel museums toward new levels of inclusion. The goal of this research has been to identify and describe emerging trends in practice among art curators who work to expand community access to art museums.

Curators were selected for this study based on their employment at art institutions with commitment to 1) community engagement and/or 2) social justice as demonstrated through their online identity. At selected institutions, the BMW Guggenheim Lab, The Bronx Museum of Arts, The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, and the Oakland Museum of California, curators were asked to participate in on-site semi-structured interviews. Key words and concepts were cross-referenced between all interviews to find similar themes in order to describe the range of emerging practices that can be found in a diverse set of exemplary art institutions.

Findings indicate that curators interviewed for this study have not abandoned more traditional curatorial roles of organizing art exhibitions and interpreting collections through specialized skill and expertise, but instead added to them. Additional roles correspond with expanding the scope of exhibitions and programs in order to engage communities considered non-traditional art museum audiences. Curator participants respond to issues that shape communities and consider how art museum spaces can be programmed and changed in order to promote comfort, familiarity and elevate community expertise and creativity. All curators in this

study are shifting the paradigm of curator/intellectual instructing public conversation to diverse communities guiding curatorial work.

Art curator participant responses suggest that traditional curatorial roles can be perceived and practiced as complimentary to community engagement rather than contradictory. This research provides art curators with an introduction to exemplary and diverse cases of emerging curatorial community engagement and the ways in which these practices can be more sustainable in the field. It also recommends strategies with which art institutions can better support curators to be integrated into community engagement goals within their institutions and the field.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Public programming, community outreach, visitor studies and education departments have been central to discussions in the museum field about strategies for broad community engagement. Jennifer Barrett (2010) writes that the curator has not been perceived as a similarly democratizing profession in museums.

International developments in museums and museum studies curricula and research reveal how the role of the curator was synonymous with the history of the authoritative museum. Therefore, in order to move away from the authoritative model, the resulting strategy was to bring into the museum new types of professionals to help facilitate more inclusive democratic institutions of culture. (p. 147 and 148)

As a profession commonly considered in opposition to museum goals of inclusion, less attention has been paid to the changing role of the curator in relation to art museum missions to provide accessible and equitable arts and cultural resources. Little documentation is available of the ways in which art curators today see their practice as actively participating in and even generating creative strategies to propel museums toward new levels of inclusion. The goal of this research is to identify and describe emerging trends in practice among art curators who work to expand access to art museums. Practices that go beyond traditional roles of caring for and coordinating art collections, art exhibitions, and the interpretation of art and relate to creating greater access to their institution will be considered emerging art curatorial practices in community engagement.

As one of the most central interpretive positions associated with art museums, the curator has held great authority over the way artwork and ideas are presented to the public through their institution. In the United States, in the early 20th century, discourses associated with the publicness of museums prompted museum professionals to question how they could better

communicate, teach and create value for arts within a broader public. Curating, an activity that has emphasized caring for objects, as well as communicating the value of art, has been perceived as less willing to progress as museum discourses have shifted to centralize visitor experiences in museums. (Elaine Gurian, 2010, p. 98)

In the 1960's and the following four decades these questions were still present, but more urgently felt as the United States civil rights movements implicated individuals, public institutions and government of their roles in discrimination based on ideologies of difference. (Takaki, 1993, p. 399) Groups such as African Americans and women, followed by LGBTQ communities and people with disabilities, put pressure on cities and the federal government, forcing civil rights abuses and exclusion onto the national stage. While hardly corrected or redressed sufficiently during this time, discriminatory practices entered the institutional and public consciousness. Institutions in the business of public service were pressured to re-evaluate the high degree to which they had discriminated and excluded large portions of the population. In art museums (staff, artists, and art), the disparities in social inclusiveness and representation were well documented. However, broad public pressure, and pressure from artists, in the 1960's through 1990's forced art museums to address cultural production and representation across racial, ethnic, and gender lines, and respond to those long discriminated against by arts institutions. (Felshin, 1995, p. 17, 331 and 335)

While "being for the good of the public," art museums have been challenged by traditions of exclusivity and elitism. In art museums, civic loci of arts and cultural preservation, representation and interpretation, visitors remain disproportionately highly educated, wealthy, and white relative to the populations of most cities and towns in the United States today. (Farrell

and Medvedeva, 2010, p. 5 and 6) Additionally, the arts and culture represented in art museums often still favor art traditions canonized through the academy or leading art writers; reinforcing social norms that marginalize the arts and culture of underrepresented populations. There is a great deal of progress to be made if cultural and social parity is to be achieved in art museums and a broad, representative range of communities are made to feel like welcome participants. Creating strong public spaces in art museums means welcoming diverse communities to determine what happens in that space.

When the phrase ‘diverse communities’ is used to describe different communities, it suggests that difference is present, accepted and positive. Diversity has also become short hand for achieving the inclusion of underrepresented groups in society, particularly people of color. Each of these usages of the term diverse is problematic. Museums are often congratulated for increasing diversity in their institutions. However, diversity can easily be used to refer to tokenism, or including individuals on the basis of difference for the purpose of achieving public respect rather than institutional transformation. The term diversity has also been critiqued because it does not adequately address the confrontation and conflict that accompanies experiences of difference in society. Ideologies of difference have long been the basis of denying groups a voice in choices that affect their lives, thus oppressing them. In the United States groups that have long been ethnic and racial minorities, marginalized by ideas of difference, will soon be majorities. Serving the needs of these populations, as well as the wide-ranging communities they represent is a necessary function of art museums that desire to encourage dialogue and pluralism amongst local communities. Due to the marginalization and oppression of groups, strategies for community engagement in museums must take into account

the unequal opportunity and socially unjust power relationships that prevent groups from accessing their arts and cultural resources.

By using the term social justice to frame trends in curatorial practice, different connotations and standards are suggested compared to the more commonly used phrase, social inclusion. Museology has adopted discourses around social inclusion, often stemming from the writing of English and Australian museologists, to confront the fact that many groups have traditionally been excluded from museum spaces. Museological social inclusion literature argues that museums can play a cultural role in making society on the whole more inclusive and accessible by offering programming, education and exhibitions that address the histories and needs of non-dominant or marginalized groups. Social justice suggests similar but not identical meanings in contrast to social inclusion. Social justice most often refers work to end oppression of groups and create equal access to and rights to resources within society. Social justice scholars argue that unjust institutional structures, policy and behaviors oppress non-dominant groups, such as those marginalized on the basis of class, race, gender, sexuality and disability. Using the phrase social justice in the art museum context assumes that museums are responsible for including and responding to communities that are socially marginalized. However, it also connotes that art museums are responsible for examining how institutional behaviors and structures throughout society and within museums contribute to discouraging access and the equal participation of underrepresented communities. An important part of social justice is work that creates just arts and cultural institutions that offer opportunities for underrepresented communities to speak for themselves and participate in determining how art museums can meet their needs. Work of this kind is part of an expanded ethic of curatorial care, from caring for

artwork to caring for communities and the social and environmental experiences that shape them, thus resulting in caring practices made more public.

There is a great deal of documentation in the field about art museum education and public programming departments engaging communities. However, the role of the art curator has its own unique heritage of art historical specialization and exhibition content development, with less primary focus on engaging communities. This tradition does not indicate that curators have remained disconnected from community engagement priorities. Yet, it does suggest that curatorial leadership in engaging communities is a more recently observable shift. The goal of this research is to identify and document emerging trends in practice among art curators who work to expand access to art museums. If the museum field better understood the ways in which art curators facilitate increased equity and access for communities within museums then best practices and known challenges could foster cross-institutional learning and change and better support networks for such practices could be fostered within art institutions. Furthermore, art curators would be able to better reflect on the unique leadership roles available to them in creating more accessible art museums.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Previous areas of research that inform a study of art curators creating community access to museums can be found in the field of museum studies and the fields of political science, sociology and critical geography. Interdisciplinary literature provides a theoretical framework for this paper to discuss the museum as a public space and establishes a discourse around what makes a strong public space. Research that focuses on how groups are oppressed and excluded from public space, civic discourse, and public decisions will be discussed to clarify the importance of engaging communities in art museums. The last section will introduce literature that suggests the role of the art curator is a key element in successfully shifting art museums toward public value and community access.

Museums and Public Space

In Jennifer Barrett's *Museums and the Public Sphere* she reflects on the history of the Museum and its link to the project of democracy as it emerged in 18th century France. Museums shifted at this point from private collections of the aristocracy to collections that were "open to all." Just as citizens were newly given rights to participate in the affairs of the state, "the public" was given access to collections that had once been held privately. Visitors would have the chance to "be in public" in the museum space and learn moral and civic values from collections and Culture. Since this time museums have been engaged with the discourses of public-ness or of being for the good of the public. Barrett suggests that the discourse of public-ness has become unclear in the museum field and that the use of the term "public" has been disconnected with its roots in the political project of democracy and its ideals. Barrett (2010) states:

The public is not an amorphous or homogenous grouping of sub-groups or individuals. Nor is public space simply a nostalgic representation of the public sphere. The production of the public sphere involves complex exchanges and negotiations between different forms of communications and practices of “*being in public*.” (p. 16)

Barrett argues that by understanding the complexity of the term and its influence in the formation of contemporary terms such as audience and community, museum professionals can better understand the museum’s role as a site of the cultural public sphere and of public deliberation. Barrett emphasizes that an increased consciousness about what it means to be a public space will allow a reconsideration of the sense in which the Museum has and has not functioned as a public space.

Barrett draws heavily from Jurgen Habermas’ conceptualization of the bourgeois public sphere to begin her discussion because of the influential nature of his work. She also refers to Tony Bennett’s theories of civic seeing to critique Habermas’ omission of the museum as a site of the public sphere. Barrett (2010) begins by pointing out that Habermas was writing specifically about 18th Century France and the rise of the new bourgeois class in the “public sphere,” which Habermas defines as an abstract realm of deliberation and participation in creating discourses of all things public. (p. 18) The public, in this case, is a body of participants who are given access to the public sphere. Habermas’ public sphere exists between the private realm and the state and is a legitimized arena in which rational discourses can gain strength and influence. Barrett reflects on Habermas’ belief that people must access the public sphere through engagement with rational discourse and via their citizenship, which is given by the state. Barrett disagrees with Habermas’ opinion that coffee shops, city squares, and salons, spaces in which Habermas states the exchange of literature and of conversation occur, are the most suited to be public space. More specifically, she does not agree with his rejection of aesthetic exchange as an

integral type of deliberation that can happen in the public sphere. Habermas dismisses aesthetics as imprecise and irrational, therefore disqualifying the museum as a site of the public sphere. However, Barrett and Tony Bennett both suggest that the act of being in public and seeing others in public is a form of visual discourse that can expand and exclude who is considered to be the public, just as speaking and exchanging literature can do this.

Bennett's (2011) idea of "civic seeing" is a process through which the visual environment of the museum, arrangements of objects and museum visitors all interact, performing and reflecting each other. This form of exchange and dialogue, while equally powerful, has been equally exclusionary in Bennett's interpretation, because it has operated "as a means for enacting social distinctions in ways that have run counter to art museums' claims to speak to and for all citizens." (p. 263) Both Bennett and Barrett consider the museum a legitimate site of aesthetic or visual public and civic discourse, and yet one that has played an exclusionary role contrary to the institution's proposed ability to be universal or for everyone. However, Barrett considers museums, as public spaces, to be uniquely positioned to include more voices, because aesthetic communication and exchange can represent less dominant and yet important discourses that are outside paradigms of knowledge valued by European elites.

Barrett's (2010) major critique of Habermas' work is that rationality is an exclusionary way of knowing and a particularly Western enlightenment ideal. (p. 36) She argues that contestation rather than rationality is a more democratic form of discourse. (p. 23) In her book *Brave New Neighborhoods*, Margaret Kohn (2004) supports this critique arguing that Habermas' idea of the public sphere was populated by the educated literary public.

Due to the dubious legality of enlightenment associations in many parts of Europe, however, the public sphere existed largely ‘behind close doors.’ Thus, the term ‘public sphere’ designated the forms and ideals of scholarly debate rather than a spatial location, let alone the disruptive, provocative politics of the streets. (p. 57-58)

Kohn argues that the spaces in which the “public sphere” resided did not allow lower classes and workers to assert their right to self-determination and civic participation through protest like the streets could, therefore public squares and streets were the true forums of the era. Kohn recognizes that Habermas would not agree because street activity, exchange and protest do not comprise his ideal of rational debate but rather invoke a type of politics which are visual, emotional and expressive. Kohn considers public spaces that are more open to democratic expansion to be those in which contestation and conflict are unavoidable. For example, she argues

There is no reciprocity when the beggar approaches the affluent. Given the fleeting opportunity for contact, the orientation is less towards truth than towards provocation. The attempt to communicate is not framed in terms of mutual respect but confrontation, anxiety, and fear of otherness. (p. 58)

Kohn uses the example of the rich interacting in spaces with the poor to provide an image of a public forum that extends participation to the presence and voice of all groups, even those marginalized in society. She further states that, “The beggar draws attention to the vulnerability that we want to deny and reproaches us for our callousness. The suffering of the other is an indictment of our comfort and ease.” Kohn states that, in the tradition of Marshall McLuhan, the medium becomes the message. The physical proximity of the “other” reminds people that society comprises different realities and experiences. She concludes this argument by claiming that, “the role of the public sphere today is to “show that our truths are not universal.” Barrett and Kohn critique Habermas for his over-valuation of rationality and truth finding truth in public discourse. Barrett suggests that, as sites of vision and aesthetics, within which alternative

experience and knowledge can be seen and represented, museums are spaces in which the cultural public sphere can be performed in a way that allows it to expand, even while it has also functioned to reinforce social exclusion.

In Sharon Zukin's *Naked City* (2009) she argues that, as an early institutional space that was opened up to "the public," museum brought a diverse (for the time) group of people together in a space where they could be seen and see others. She highlights the progressive nature of public institutions in the 19th century such as the libraries, museums and parks. She states that they:

Made the city's cultural wealth freely available to all before all groups got the right to vote. Though the rich often thought of these urban public spaces as instruments for improving the minds and behavior of the lower classes, and didn't design them for everyone's needs, the ideal of open access confirmed the spaces as "authentically" public and helped to define the modern public as well. Public parks, museums, and libraries broke down traditional barriers that excluded women, the poor, and children from taking their place in the same public space as everyone else. (p. 129)

Zukin states that this access was a progressive move toward democracy or "authenticity," as she defines it but that these spaces were still regulated by elite classes. Barrett (2010) also sees the same 18th and 19th century Museum as a tool of the state where narratives of nationality, colonialism, and public behavior were normalized and reinforced through an authoritative relationship with visitors. (p. 53)

The conflation of the agendas of the State in the 18th and 19th centuries and the Museum is just one of the ways in which, Barrett (2010) states, public-ness has been articulated in a confusing way. For example, the word "public" has been used to refer to an institution of the state and an institution for the people.

The fact that museums are often institutions of the state seems to exclude them from being spaces of the public sphere. In other words if the museum is to be understood as a space of the public sphere, between the state and the people, then it needs to be a site where people are able to determine and address matters of public importance. (p. 81)

Barrett states that the past relationship between the government and the Museum has informed contemporary tendencies to conflate state and public spheres. For example, today museums are often considered to be public because they are a state institution or state supported. (p. 10) She goes on to argue that the public is often seen in binary to the private. She suggests that “private” often refers to the privatized market economy, which also plays a role in museum spaces today. (p. 91-92) Though in some usages “public” connotes state and “private” connotes private businesses, Barrett (2010) suggests that the use of this term should be monitored so that it is not confused with the other long-standing tradition of using “public” to refer to democratic processes separate from the State.

Many museums have tried to be public – inclusive, accessible – since their modern invention. They have been products of their time, interpreting what it means to be “public,” in accordance with the site, discourses, and practices of the period, demonstrating how the idea of accessibility also changes over time and space. (p. 98)

Within this definition of “public,” as a body that is distinct from state and private interests, she suggests that the limitation of the museum as a public space is more easily understood, because it has been influenced by government and private business interests throughout its history. Even though, Barrett argues, museums have been situated in historical contexts in which dominant and elite groups have prevented equal participation in the public sphere, museums are also spaces in which the democratic ideal has played a defining role in its relationship to society. (p. 106)

The characteristics of a public space in an ideally democratic sense are useful to consider, Barrett (2010) suggests, so that museums can see how they are situated in relation to these

characteristics and to what extent they can claim public-ness. Barrett cites both Henri Lefebvre and Don Mitchell and their notion that public space should offer “representational space” and “space for representation,” respectively. “Representational space” is lived in and used and “space for representation” allows social groups to lay claim to space and become more publicly recognized. For example, public space is one of the only spaces that affords disenfranchised groups, such as the homeless, a way to become visible to others. (p. 93) The materiality of space as opposed to a public sphere is important in this case because political activity and representation can occur in space instead of exist in the realm of ideas. Barrett also cites Rosalyn Deutsche who argues that public space is an institutionalized space of contestation in which society can be, “at once constituted and put to risk.” (p. 94) These ideas of public space are used by Barrett to support her claim that visual and spatial representation is necessary for understanding how publics are constituted and performed, such as the kind which museums have potential for. She argues that “being in public” in museums and viewing art that is politically engaged can act as “publicity,” an important part of Habermas’ public sphere with which exchange and discourse are catalyzed. (p. 95)

Ideas about the visual and the spatial elements of the public are also important to Margaret Kohn’s reading of democratic processes. Kohn (2004) makes a distinction between public space and the private realm, and supports the idea that contestation is important to the idea of public space put forward by Barrett.

The fantasy of the private realm involves intimacy, safety, and control. According to this fantasy, the home is imagined as a place where the unfamiliar is absent and compromise unnecessary. In public she is confronted by visible reminders of the fact that others may want different things. (p. 7)

Kohn goes on to suggest that, when public spaces become more like the private realm, existing patterns of segregation are reinforced. Likewise, in Sharon Zukin's study of public private partnerships that manage parks in New York City, she argues that control of parks by Business Improvement Districts give unelected individuals control over regulating space for private or individual gains. This can often result in excluding park users and regulating park activity for the sake of those with more consuming power and social dominance. The control of parks by private organizations offers a safe, accessible and well cared for environment to those who have normative social identities and who follow the rules of the space and remain un-confrontational. In contrast, Zukin (2009) argues, democracy – in space and in politics – is, “often loud, unruly, and unpredictable.” (p. 129)

Zukin, Kohn, Bennett and Barrett offer conceptions of public space as contested, accessible to alternative publics, and affording a material way for diverse groups to become visible to each other. They problematize the “public sphere” as Habermas idealizes it by arguing that the public sphere must not universalize experience and knowledge. Instead, they agree that the public sphere must allow multiple points of view to co-exist and also must include a spatial element, public space, which allows a foundation for communities to claim visibility and their right to it's use, thereby expanding the notion of who is public. Zukin and Kohn thoroughly consider both the challenges and value of public space today. They argue that allowing spaces in which democratic processes of equal representation exist will mean that people who fear “otherness” will feel uncomfortable. Both Zukin and Kohn refer to the example of the privileged confronting the poor. Barrett acknowledges both the failure of and the potential for museums to become public spaces that afford diverse public spheres room to coexist and interact. She also addresses the increasing ability of museums and curators to release control and power in museum

spaces so that experiences can be open to community participation. However, she does not say whether or not she thinks museums have the ability to open themselves up to the kind of contestation of space that Kohn and Zukin introduce; one in which communities have the opportunity to challenge their exclusion from public discourse and can also gather to protest.

Museums and Social Injustice

i) Communities, Diversity and Pluralism

Jennifer Barrett centers much of her discussion of the shifts within the museum field on the “new museology” movement. The goals of “new museology” have been to increase community engagement and participation as a response to the institutional critiques of power and elitism in museums. This movement has given museums a critical lens with which to evaluate themselves and their relationship to “the public,” but Barrett argues, in correspondence with this movement the terms public, community, and audience are often used interchangeably to the detriment of each as a unique concept. She (2010) argues that understanding “community” and its relationship to “the public” and “public space” makes the museum’s role in relation to each more clear.

With a more nuanced approach to the site-specific publics and understanding of community, we may see the museum develop its competency to articulate the public in ways that are recognizable and commensurate with the “real world.” (p. 119)

For Barrett the “real world” is one that acknowledges diversity and contestation in the public sphere. She suggests that museums have turned to the concept of “community,” because it is “assumed to be more democratic; a way of getting closer or more intimate with ‘the people.’” However, she goes on to say that looking to “community” to solve the problems of “the public”

will backfire since, “A closer look at the idea of community reveals similar limitations to the term ‘public’” (p. 129).

According to Barrett (2010) the concept of the public is often conflated with the government and thus, the role of the public sphere, positioned between government and individuals, has been transferred to the level of community. (p. 130) Community then becomes understood as the most authentic level of democratic participation. Barrett states that the concept of community has also developed alongside the concept of “place,” the material realm of community. Place is understood as a localized space that is more comfortable for community interaction, and thus the loci for “real” democratic engagement. Communities, thus, have the ability to make spaces into places, which are understood as the more humanized formation of the public sphere (Barrett, 2010, p. 131). However, rather than acting as a replacement for “the public,” Barrett argues that community is a different element of the democratic process that is similarly always changing.

In her article, “Museums and Community,” Elizabeth Croke (2011) suggests that the concept of community is used in the United Kingdom’s local and government museum policy to connote that museums are, “Meaningful for a broader range of people...moving away from the grand narrative, traditionally told in national museums, and giving greater recognition to local and community histories” (p. 171). She (2011) also states that community groups are now using museum activity as a vehicle for protest to form new “circuits of power” and national museums are creating sustainable networks that “promote access and inclusion and are accountable to diverse communities” (p. 172). Barrett contends that even those museums that are not mainly government supported also share the heritage and rhetoric of being for the public and therefore

must also be held accountable to claims of publicness in the sense that Crooke has associated with government and national museums. Barrett (2010) advocates that museums that have adopted this rhetoric and say they are shifting toward more broad participation should consider their potential as a unique site of the cultural public sphere (pg. 81 and 82).

Margaret Kohn also understands “community” as misused term, which has acted as a replacement for the concept of the public. She argues that, as opposed to “public,” community lies between public and private life. She agrees with Barrett when she argues that many use the concept as an alternative to public because it appears more authentic. However, she (2004) argues that public life should not be dismissed in exchange for community life.

Community is an appealing alternative to public life. It promises to provide the pleasures of sociability without the discomforts of the unfamiliar. It offers the fellowship of a shared world without demanding the sacrifices of sharing with those who have less to offer. Although the desire for community is legitimate, it must be supplemented by public spiritedness. (p. 194)

Kohn defines this public spiritedness as having three main characteristics, “sharing, solidarity and diversity,” because, she argues, “public things are not for the exclusive use of an individual or group.” For Barrett (2010), “Community is not a thing in itself, but it becomes a conduit for the individual to the public sphere” (p. 135). Kohn and Barrett consider community as neither the same thing as the public nor as a replacement for the public, but rather as a way in which alternative voices can be advanced into the public sphere.

Kohn’s critique of the conflation of public and community also includes a critique of community itself as a necessarily positive concept. She (2004) importantly points out the segregating effect that community without a role in the larger public sphere can create and

suggests that the importance of public space lies in its ability to encourage sharing amongst those that are dissimilar. (p. 194) Elizabeth Crooke (2011) also takes this position, stating:

Emerging apparently effortlessly from shared characteristics, community is, in fact, constructed in a deliberate fashion, bringing security to its makers and uncertainty to those who feel they do not belong. Critical to the success of cultural codes, rituals, and symbols of belonging is their selectivity and ability to be recognized by those who are not part of that community...If community is about coming together and unity, it is equally about division and exclusion. (p. 173)

Crooke argues that through maintaining the complexity of and understanding the uses of the concept of community, museums will be better equipped to incorporate community concerns into museums as a public space.

According to Setha Low, Dana Taplin and Suzanne Scheld (2005) in *Rethinking Urban Parks: Public Space and Cultural Diversity* public spaces have an important role to play in today's changing world. They write that, though minority populations are growing at a rate that will make them majorities in the United States' near future, immigrant enclaves and gated communities are also increasing the homogeneity of the landscape. (p. 3) Margaret Kohn (2004) similarly argues that marginalization is the, "Strategy pursued by many shopping malls, gated communities, and business improvement districts, which are structured to prevent unsettling encounters with people who cast doubt upon our favored narratives of community and equality" (p. 205). Lowe, Taplin and Scheld (2005) state that this trend toward the privatization of large public spaces is harmful to the overall social fabric of cities. Accommodating all the differences between people in the United States today is an urgent issue for these writers, and they put forward a solution.

One way...is to make sure that our urban parks, beaches, and heritage sites – those large urban spaces where we all come together – remain public, in the sense of providing a

place for everyone to relax, learn, and recreate; and open so that we have places where interpersonal and inter group cooperation and conflict can be worked out in a safe and public forum. (p. 3)

Low, Taplin and Scheld suggest that preserving public spaces will take on an increasingly important role as a platform to promote social cohesion.

Diana L. Eck (2006), a professor of comparative religion and Indian studies, argues that the existence of diversity does not mean groups interact or cooperate, and refers to ideas brought up by Low, Taplin and Scheld about the value of the sustained interactions and confrontations of diverse groups.

All of America's diversity, old and new, does not add up to pluralism. "Pluralism" and "diversity" are sometimes used as if they were synonyms, but diversity is just plurality, plain and simple — splendid, colorful, perhaps threatening. Pluralism is the engagement that creates a common society from all that plurality. (p. 1)

Eck considers plurality to be the true goal for American society. She states that pluralism is only one possible avenue that is available with the presence of diversity; the other two are exclusion and assimilation. Americans have had all three reactions in the face of expanding religious and cultural diversity. She argues, "Diversity can and often has meant isolation and the creation of virtual ghettos of religion and sub-culture with little traffic between them. The dynamic of pluralism, however, is one of meeting, exchange, and two-way traffic" (p. 2). Along with diversity, Eck critiques the idea of tolerance as a false virtue, because, "it does not does not require people to know anything at all about one another. As a result, tolerance can let us harbor all the stereotypes and half-truths that we want to believe about our neighbors. Tolerance does little to remove our ignorance of one another" (p. 2). Instead, pluralism requires that people engage with each other and acknowledge differences through dialogue. Eck identifies a need for venues in which these dialogues can take place such as the large urban spaces that Low, Taplin

and Scheld (2005) propose. Eck asks, "Where are those public spaces, those "tables" where people of various religious traditions and none meet in American society?" (p. 4). Eck believes that these conversations can happen in many places of public life, and need to be prioritized so that the tensions created by difference can be addressed openly resulting in a complex understanding of who "we" are today. (p. 4)

The question of who "we" are today in the United States is taken up by the American Association of Museums (AAM) in the *Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums* (Farrell and Medvedeva, 2010). The report begins from the premise that museums have not been successful in equitably serving minority populations. (p. 6) The study by Reach & Associates (2010) is used by the AAM report and indicates the class and race heterogeneity of art museum visitors today. In their study of 40,000 museum-going families they found that 65% of respondents were over 50, respondents had the highest college attainment of any type of museum at 86% with a college degree, and 92% identified as white. In the recent AAM report, data gathered by the U.S. Census indicates the broad population shifts occurring in the U.S.

By 2050, the Hispanic/Latino populations will have doubled again to comprise 30 percent of the U.S. population, with the percentage of Asian Pacific Americans increasing more slowly and the percentage of African Americans holding steady at 12–13 percent. Sometime between 2040 and 2050, depending on which projection model is employed, the current U.S. minority groups... will collectively become the new majority in the United States. (p. 9)

The AAM report argues that, according to those served currently by museums and the way the population is shifting, museums are ill prepared to attract and serve large sectors of the future United States population.

ii) Social Exclusion in the United States

In her account of racial exclusion in museums for the *Journal of Museums and Social Issues*, “The Problem of the 21st Century is Still the Color Line,” museum studies professor Gretchen Sullivan Sorin (2007) states that

Members of minority communities, whose history and art had been excluded from the historical record, demanded that museums, as public institutions, meet the cultural needs of more Americans and that they become more democratic and less elitist. (p. 5)

Sorin is specifically citing the “New Audiences” study of 1972 and goes on to argue that though this was progressive research it has yet to be openly and widely addressed by museum communities.

Too few exhibitions have successfully explored our shared past—the stories of the complex interrelationships between and among groups. While we have diversified our programs and, in some cases, our boards of trustees, we have not yet done enough to successfully recruit people of underrepresented groups to careers in museum work. (p. 9)

Sorin takes the title of her article from a quote by W.E.B. Dubois, the 20th century black intellectual and writer. She argues that in the 21st century, America and museums are far from post-racial and still dealing with the color line. Likewise, in her article, “Troubled Legacy,” Tracy Teslow (2007) addresses the structures that perpetuate racism in the United States, and which have yet to be fully addressed by museums. Teslow argues that while the United States has opened up to the participation and discourses of many communities of color, many of the structural inequalities remain in place, preventing many communities of color from equitably participating in many realms of public life, including museum spaces.

In the same *Journal*, Tracy Teslow places the emphasis in her argument on the structural and hidden way that racial categories construct social inequity today.

It is not race that produces disparities of wealth and power, but rather disparities in wealth and power that first made it possible to construct and deploy the ideology of race, and then to persistently, overtly and covertly, reinforce and recreate it. (p. 12-13)

Teslow's understanding of the way racism is perpetuated through a compounding of hidden reinforcements is addressed by Clarissa Rile Hayward and Todd Swanstrom in their essay, "Thick Injustice," the introduction to their compilation of writing in *Justice and the American Metropolis*. Hayward and Swanstrom (2011) discuss the way that political discourses about justice have changed since the 1960's and 70's when racial prejudice and racist laws were openly and morally criticized. Today, they state that political discourse about injustice has changed:

Not only and not principally because of changing beliefs but also crucially because of changes in the structure of unjust power relations. At the start of the 21st century American cities are sites of what we call *thick injustice*: unjust power relations that are deep and densely concentrated, as well as opaque and relatively intractable. (p. 4)

By looking at Marxist, Post-Marxist and Libertarian beliefs about metropolitan injustice, the authors argue that according to a wide range of beliefs today's cities are unjust. They argue that whether justice is discerned by measure of disproportionate power held by those who hold the means of production (Marxism), structural social, political, and economic inequality that restricts participation in decision making (Post-Structuralist) or a lack of fair and free market practices (libertarian) the current state of American justice is weak. (p. 7-8) Therefore, they offer "thick injustice" as a concept that can explain the disappearance of social justice debates in contemporary politics. For Hayward and Swanstrom, this concept encompasses the deep historical roots of injustice in the United States, institutional structures of local government in the US and the link of injustice with place. All these factors make injustice, "difficult to see and difficult to assign responsibility for it- and hence difficult to change" (p.4).

Hayward and Swanstrom (2011) argue that resources that would enable marginalized

groups to gain control over their lives have consistently been denied them in the United States and a thick injustice has kept these groups disadvantaged in terms of income, education, employment, and health to name several (p. 6). The AAM report on demographics (2010) points to this when it states that, “Many highly diverse cities are, in fact, composed of separate enclaves determined by race, ethnicity and social class” (p. 20). This corresponds with Laura Pulido, professor of American studies and ethnicity, writing on urban patterns of disinvestment in metropolitan areas inhabited by low-income communities of color and the disproportionate number of communities of color that have a low-income status. In her book, *Race, Class and Political Activism*, Pulido (2006) writes that, though racial categories are ideological social constructions, race has material dimensions.

Urban housing markets, which are considered to be free markets, produce highly skewed and racialized outcomes that can be seen in the urban landscape. It is well known that U.S. cities are highly segregated, particularly in terms of Blacks and whites. (p. 24)

Due to redlining practices and other manipulative real estate practices white prejudice was structurally reinforced in the United States allowing whites to avoid living in black neighborhoods. White people have profited from the devaluation of Black neighborhoods and property, and their property values have been inflated because of it. Post-war policies that discriminated against people of color, particularly African Americans, are the racialized historical foundations for segregated urban spaces today and the wealth gap. Pulido states that the policies that restricted black home ownership effected the long term wealth and transfer of wealth within community's of color, because in the United States wealth has predominantly been passed through home equity (p. 24). Hayward and Swanstrom (2011) also point out housing's connection to other inequalities:

Historic discrimination in housing contributed not only to contemporary inequalities of wealth but to contemporary inequalities of access to education and other locally controlled public services. It contributed to inequalities in higher education (which co-varies with wealth) and to the capital that entrepreneurs need for business investments. (p. 11)

Even though directly discriminatory policies have been overturned, Hayward and Swanstrom argue there are many policies that reinforce inequality today because of their root in past discrimination. For example, they cite how economically efficient sites for highways and redevelopment is usually land historically owned by low-income communities and communities of color. Redeveloping areas inhabited by these communities puts disproportionate social, economic and psychological strain on them (p. 11).

The disparities in access to education and the disadvantaging impact it has on communities of color is addressed by Gloria Ladson-Billings in her article “Pushing Past the Achievement Gap: An Essay on the Language of Defecit.” Ladson-Billings suggests that discourses of the “achievement gap,” or the disparity between the successful educational outcomes for white students relative to students of color, use a detrimental rhetoric of “deficit.” Ladson-Billings (2006) writes, “Rather than focusing on telling people to ‘catch up’ we have to think about how we will begin to pay down this mountain of debt we have amassed at the expense of entire groups of people and their subsequent generations” (p. 316). For example, she states, schools in areas inhabited by people of color have been disproportionately under-funded, and this has significantly decreased the earning ratios of people of color in relation to the white population. She also cites other structural inequities that effect student learning such as health disparities, the disproportionately greater chances of health problems and of less health benefits for students of color in low-performing schools than white students in high-performing schools.

Critiquing the idea that students that perform poorly come from a “culture of poverty,”

Ladson –Billings (2006) states that

Poverty is not a culture. It is a condition produced by economic, social and political arrangements of society. Poverty is linked to the values of a society. When we think it is acceptable to work and not earn a living wage, we contribute to the creation of poverty. When we demand low prices for goods and services – we participate in the creation of poverty. (p. 320)

Ladson-Billings implicates everyone in this system of injustices. She argues that the privilege of some directly takes resources away from others.

The poverty that exists on one side of town is related to the affluence on the other side. When one segment of society regularly and consistently has access to the best schools, the best health care, the best communities, and social resources, it means that other segments lack or have limited access. (p. 320)

Jennifer Barrett would perhaps critique here Ladson-Billings use of the phrase “best communities.” Ladson-Billings is indicating a geographic area, but her use of the word also suggests community in the sense that Barrett links it to democratic processes; that communities - linked to space where inequalities have materially manifest- have less agency to bring their experiences and identity into the public sphere. This meaning is reinforced by Ladson-Billings when she states that reframing “the achievement gap” as the “education debt” works to

Remind us that we have, for large periods of our history, excluded groups from the political process where they might have a say in democratically determining what education should look like in their communities. And, it reminds us that we are engaged as we reflect on our unethical and immoral treatment of our underserved populations. (p. 321)

Ladson-Billings concludes that all sectors of society are implicated in perpetuating the way communities of color are disproportionately poor, incarcerated, less healthy and without access to public resources, and thus also have lower rates of academic achievement. She further argues

that excluded groups have been denied the power to change their situation for the better through democratic processes.

David Harvey has also notably addressed the way that groups have been excluded from the means of controlling what happens in city spaces that effect them everyday. Harvey (1998) argues that “the right to the city” is a right that is ignored as a human right today.

The right to the city is far more than an individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is moreover a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. (p. 23)

Harvey argues that, under a capitalist model, urban growth is a result of surplus through “accumulation by dispossession visited upon the least well-off” and reinvested in city spaces that are created or planned to serve the needs of the privileged (p. 39). Harvey suggests a process of exclusion from civic issues and public concerns that is similar to Ladson-Billings. Ladson-Billings (2006), speaking directly about race in the U.S., shows that in the United States, race has been used as a tool to justify dispossession and withhold the rights of groups to direct what happens in their own communities. Hayward and Swanstrom (2011) address race as a player in systems of American injustices but expand the discussion saying, “Not only racial discrimination, but also any past injustice that shapes current relations of power – gender discrimination, for example, or exploitative or otherwise unjust labor practices can produce contemporary injustices that are “thick,” in the sense of “difficult to penetrate” (p. 12). Hayward and Swanstrom state that this thick injustice calls for a culture of, not only moral responsibility, but also, political responsibility. Political responsibility they define as “a matter less of blameworthiness than of the shared obligation to work to understand, criticize and change those unjust outcomes to which multiple agents contribute, even if unconsciously” (p. 19).

Richard Sandell has most notably theorized about the role of the museum in relation to contemporary policies that seek to correct the disenfranchisement and marginalization of various groups. In England in the late 90's the Social Inclusion Unit of the New Labour Party was drawing greater public attention to debate and policy that addressed social exclusion (Sandell, 2001, p. 401). As a result Sandell observes that museums too were being asked to demonstrate their relevance to society by becoming agents of social inclusion. Along with government pressure Sandell states that lobbying from minority groups has also put pressure on the public sector to make services more accessible. He asks, "What place, if any, should the museum occupy in the rapidly changing landscape of social inclusion policies? ... And what, if anything, can be achieved through the agency of museums?" (p. 401). Sandell concludes that if social exclusion is the complex, interconnected process of being shut out economically, socially, politically and culturally then the responsibility for this process is widely shared. Therefore, he states, museums, as part of a multi-agency approach to counteract the causes of exclusion are integral to breaking down systems of exclusion. He argues that

The museum might be seen as validating, endorsing, and thereby encouraging exclusionary practices and processes within the political, social and economic dimensions. Hence, the museum that fails to tell the story of minority groups, not only denies access to its services for that group but also exacerbates their position of exclusion by broadcasting an exclusive image reinforcing the prejudice and discriminatory practices of museum users and the wider society (p. 408).

Sandell calls this a dialogic process, and considers that if museums have the ability to contribute toward exclusion then they may also be capable of re-integrating the excluded. He writes that, "the idea that culture might possess the potential to bring about social cohesion or to narrow social inequalities is not new" (p. 409). While the 18th century museum expressly sought to offer social reform and reprieve, like Zukin (2009), Barrett (2010), and Bennett, (2011) Sandell

concludes that they still functioned to exclude groups by reinforcing rather than breaking down the separations between classes. Today, however, with new policies and incentives for museums to address social exclusion Sandell (2002) sees potential for museums to, through representing community culture, generate self-esteem, improve quality of life, self-determination and social understanding (p. 413). However, he sees that evidence and understanding of these roles is not well-documented or understood, in fact

Rarely are such intentions explicitly expressed by the museum as its goal or mission. Indeed, little empirical research has been conducted into the impact of initiatives centered around cultural inclusion, their effects on the wider process of social exclusion, and the lives of those who are excluded. (p. 411)

He later also argues that though some museums have taken advantage of museum potential for involvement in social inclusion and advocating for community culture it is not widely prioritized. He argues, “Those museums that clearly articulate their purpose in relation to society and which purposefully seek to position themselves as organizations with a part to play in multi-agency solutions for tackling social exclusion, are nevertheless still rare” (p. 415). Sandell states that even though the potential is not widely recognized in museums they may have a unique though hardly comprehensive role to play amongst many other institutions and agencies in eliminating exclusion.

Access to Museums and Arts and Culture

Jennifer Barrett (2010) argues that museums understand themselves as public, linked to the development of democracy, without understanding the role public spaces play in democracy or what makes them accessible (p. 81-82). Likewise, a major theme of Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) is that art museums are public spaces that symbolize

democracy but are limitedly accessible. Bourdieu argues that access, in relation to art museum, is attained through feelings of ownership and the ability to use cultural codes of participation. Bourdieu, who conducted visitor studies at large encyclopedic European museums in the 1960's and 70's, suggests that Museums are designed and function to reproduce ease in access for the wealthy and educated classes. Habitus is the concept that Bourdieu originated to describe the social and psychological realms of familiarity and comfort experienced by different groups.

Bourdieu concluded from his visitor studies that art experiences in museums, rather than being accessible to all through pure aesthetic intuition, are associated with learned cultural codes of conduct. Art experiences in the museums he studied were based in traditions of Western art production and viewing only obtained through higher education, which is itself a feature of privilege.

The museum gives to all, as a public legacy, the monuments of a splendid past...but this is false generosity, because free entrance is also optional entrance, reserved for those who, endowed with the ability to appropriate the works, have the privilege of using this freedom and who find themselves consequently legitimized in their privilege. (p. 237)

Bourdieu writes that making art museums free and using democratic language to frame the services of art museums is misleading, particularly, because they

Claim that works of art have the power to awaken the grace of aesthetic enlightenment in anyone, however culturally uninitiated he or she may be, to presume in all cases – to ascribe to the unfathomable accidents of grace or to the arbitrary bestowal of 'gifts' aptitudes which are always the product of unevenly distributed education. (p. 237)

Bourdieu takes issue with the idea that art experiences are democratic by default because they take place in so-called "public" institutions. He connects education to art appreciation in museums and points out that the same educational opportunities are not available to everyone, therefore drawing a connection between class and art museum access.

Jennifer Barrett (2010) writes that Bourdieu's study was very influential and triggered a broad response from museums to reevaluate how they made artwork accessible, particularly in the form of the "new museology" movement (p. 3). However, Bourdieu's tendency to frame museum exclusion as an unchanging function, when, in fact, museums have developed alongside broader democratic discourses according to the context of time and place (p. 123). Nonetheless, Bourdieu points out that saying a museum is "free" and "public" does not mean that a museum is accessible to those whose culture is not actively represented or consulted by museums, something that Barrett draws critical attention to. She states that social movements have broadened the "public sphere" and asserted the failings of democratic processes and spaces, including museums. She states, "Museums have... sought to attract sectors of the public that do not historically – attend museums. In this way they have acknowledged that they have neither acted as, nor been perceived as, being 'for the public' despite a history of being *public institutions*" (p. 5). Museums, Barrett argues, have been reflective of the culture of the groups who have maintained social and political dominance in the public sphere at various points in history.

In the current study by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, *Fusing Arts Culture and Social Change*, findings reflected an uneven distribution of funds to arts and cultural organizations is examined (Holly Sidford, 2010, p. 1). Arts and cultural organizations that serve a more representative group of communities are receiving less foundational support than other organizations. The report states:

Every year, approximately 11 percent of foundation giving – about \$2.3 billion in 2009 – is awarded to nonprofit arts and cultural institutions. The distribution of these funds is demonstrably out of balance with our evolving cultural landscape and with the changing demographics of our communities. Current arts grant making disregards large segments of cultural practice, and by doing so, it disregards large segments of our society. (p. 1)

This is not to mention the amount of these dollars that actually gets spent on underserved communities or directly channeled into social justice initiatives in arts institutions.

Only 10 percent of grant dollars made with a primary or secondary purpose of supporting the arts explicitly benefit underserved communities, including lower-income populations, communities of color and other disadvantaged groups. And less than 4 percent focus on advancing social justice goals. These facts suggest that most arts philanthropy is not engaged in addressing inequities that trouble our communities, and is not meeting the needs of our most marginalized populations. (p. 1)

According to this study, it is not currently a priority for philanthropic giving to arts and cultural organizations to support broad access to the arts.

Jennifer Kondo, a Ph.D. student at Columbia University also looks at art institutional access and how this is influenced by the spatial distribution of arts institutions in New York City. Kondo's (2011) summary of her research, *The Cultural Democracy Myth*, is particularly critiquing the claim by New York officials that the city is in an age of "cultural democracy." She argues that art institutions are not part of the everyday lived experience of all areas of the city, and thus, all communities in a city. Through mapping art institutions in the city Kondo finds that the gentrified central areas of the city and the neighborhoods with the most money are also the areas with the most concentrated art institutions, such as theater's, galleries and art museums. However, these more wealthy areas are also mostly white and not predominantly areas resided in by people of color. Kondo's study suggests that along with educational exclusion and the reinforcement of dominant culture, which Bourdieu suggests are social functions of museums, art museums today are spatially positioned to be part of the everyday for wealthy communities. Kondo refers to the "Institutional Exposure Hypothesis" to frame her argument about why this spatial absence of art institutions may be detrimental to under-served communities:

Spatial exposure to cultural institutions creates capacities for neighborhoods and their residents. While all neighborhoods have culture, when institutionalized, such culture generates additional cognitive and social benefits. (p. 65-67)

She argues that, while there are many types of culture, institutionalized culture is important because it is a platform to legitimate identity and have a role in public culture on a larger scale. Kondo states that institutionalized culture can result in empowerment and social capital gains for communities. This conceptualization is similar to Jennifer Barrett's (2010) definition of community as a conduit through which democratic representation and participation can be accessed through spaces of the public sphere.

Like Bourdieu (1993), Kondo (2011) claims that the cultural capital provided by art institutions is not only distributed to, but also spatially concentrated amongst, elites. Thus, the social and cultural capital, which art museums have the power to distribute, is not as accessible to lower classes and communities of color like those in New York City (Kondo, p. 95-95). Not everyone has the code or privilege to have familiarity or a sense of ownership for art in museums, because art museums do not play a spatial role in the everyday life of most "publics" (Kondo, p. 95-96). The inequities in the spatial and social distribution of institutional resources, according to arts institutional access studies and recent records of funding distribution, demonstrate the types of barriers that can stand in the way of the expansion of the museum as a public space (Sidford, 2010, p. 65).

The Urban Institute's Arts and Culture Indicators Project (ACIP) has worked on a comprehensive study of how arts and culture affect neighborhood community dynamics (Jackson and Herranz, 2003, p. 5). The premise of ACIP's study has been:

(a) that a healthy place to live includes opportunities for and the presence of arts, culture,

and creative expression, (b) that arts, culture, and creative expression are important determinants of how communities fare, and by extension (c) that full understanding of U.S. communities is inherently impossible without including these important perspectives. (p. 5)

In doing this ACIP's goal is to expand the paradigm, "of what counts as arts and culture in a way that makes it more consistent with, and inclusive of, the demographic realities of our nation—including low- and moderate-income communities, communities of color, and immigrant communities" (p. 5). The research team examined the concept of cultural vitality, which, through interviews, focus groups and participant observation in communities, researchers came to define as, "evidence of creating, disseminating, validating and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life" (p. 16). Through this study they argue communities were able to communicate what arts and cultural resources were significant to them. The range of activities included in their definition is broad - from the ballet to poetry slams to street murals.

The ACIP study also places emphasis on the fact that arts and cultural resources come from communities rather than being brought to communities (p. 16). Their comprehensive picture of vitality includes three main areas: presence of opportunities for cultural participation, cultural participation itself, and support for cultural participation. According to their study a mix of formal and traditional venues for arts and cultural participation must be mixed with informal arts and cultural activities in order for communities to have a greater degree of cultural vitality. The report argues that catalyzing organizations that have community wide connections and relationships, called "pillar organizations," are essential for the diverse participation and network of community stakeholders important to their definition of cultural vitality. Though the report states that art museums are an important factor to look for as an indicator of cultural vitality, it suggests that they are not necessarily but can be "pillar organizations" (p. 19). The report seeks

to inform policy makers and urban planners so that they pay more attention to ensuring communities have what they need so that they can provide support to nurture and retain cultural vitality (p. 20).

Tracy Teslow (2007) argues that there are and have been many strategies initiated by under-represented communities to create their own museum spaces that can more directly be open to the access of community participation and address in the public arena. Ethnic heritage museums, ethnic specific museums and national museums have been founded, with influence from community leaders, to address the lack of existing museum space to accommodate alternative experiences. Teslow argues that, however progressive these new museum spaces are they indicate that:

American politics and society seem to require separate spaces for racialized topics, spaces separate from institutions that lay claim to a national voice—not only local museums, but also the National Museum of the American Indian, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. Americans don't seem ready to fully embrace populations with the most painful pasts as part of a national narrative, much less a national narrative that acknowledges the central role of racism in American history and life. (p. 37-38)

Teslow suggests that museums, have not found ways to represent race yet. She suggests that this is a major barrier to museums providing a public space that offers the characteristics that enable democratic processes and an expanded public. Teslow's criticism firmly addresses the current challenges for museums in representing diverse and oppressed voices, but the AAM report on Demographic change (2010) suggests that museums can indeed make changes that allow racial, class, and community diversity to coexist in museum space. The AAM report argues that when museums incorporate the arts, culture and community needs of underserved populations there is growth in attendance and positive reactions to art experiences in museums.

Marketing studies suggest that African Americans are more likely to attend events characterized by black themes and in which blacks are well represented among performers, staff and audience members. This research is further supported by an Urban Institute survey which found that African American and Hispanic participants were more likely than others to list the desire to “celebrate heritage” and “support a community organization” as reasons to attend arts and cultural events. (p. 14)

This report suggests that, because the heritage of Blacks and Hispanics and their arts and culture are underrepresented in the United States today, seeing their interests and the discourses of their ethnic communities as part of museum priorities can comfort in and increased use of museums. The AAM report references further studies which suggest that access and belonging are encouraged amongst many more communities when museums offer sign design that is sensitive to bilingual visitors, when educational programming includes childhood education for families, and when art and programming about diverse ethnicities and heritages are given equal priority (p. 14). The story behind the disparate numbers of ethnic and racial minority museum-goers and white museum-goers have a great deal to do with social networks, historic exclusion, unfamiliarity with elite art forms and aesthetics, family history of not attending museums for arts and culture (p. 13). Financial, leisure, and locational barriers also structure museum attendance and also correlate closely with race and ethnicity (p. 14.) The AAM report on demographics looks at these structural barriers to attendance, the changing populations of the U.S., and the complexity of communities in the U.S. and calls for learning from communities about their needs and diversifying the field itself to be more representative of the cultural and ethnic landscape of the U.S (p. 30).

4. Shifting Roles in Curation

In her chapter “Museums as Public Intellectual” Jennifer Barrett (2010) addresses the discourse that curators represent the major barrier for museums in trying to develop a less

authoritative relationship with the public in the wake of institutional museum critiques. She states, the curator was accused of “Assuming to much about his/her public” and being “too authoritarian, and unaccountable.” (p. 143) Barrett argues that “new museology” greatly influenced the rethinking of the museum’s intellectual relationship to the public and thus, curatorial roles. For example, she describes three central ideas to the “new museology:” object meanings are contextual rather than inherent, museums and their activities cannot transcend entertainment or market concerns and audience experiences of exhibits will vary and can not be pre-determined. Barrett identifies that there are many ways that museums have responded to these altered perspectives on the function of museums in society. One response was to focus museum attention away from the specialist roles of curator and director and redirect it toward visitor studies, education and programming concerns. For example, many museums have eliminated Curator as a position title. (p. 147) Barrett argues that, during recent museum shifts, it was understood that, of all museum professions, curators understood the public the least and thus, were a large part of the barriers to public engagement. (p. 150)

Elaine Gurian (2010) has also contributed to this discourse of the disconnection of curators from the public. She states, “By job description, curators have been the acknowledged voice of museum authority.” She argues that even now, “the museum field generally, its curators, and those academic departments focused on training curators remain at the core philosophically unchanged despite their new websites and shiny new technological reference centers” (p. 97). Gurian highlights that in the face of participatory forms of communication through the internet, participatory knowledge creation movements such as Wikipedia, and social media sites, curators may not be able to offer fulfillment to a public that increasingly desires, “intellectual interactivity” (p. 98). However, Gurian also suggests that new understandings of audience

participation and knowledge co-creation will allow curators that are open to create models for valuable and relevant curatorial relationships with the public.

In 2009, CurCom, or the Standing Curatorial Committee of the American Association of Museums, updated their “Code of Ethics” for curators in the United States. The document sets clear guidelines for the interdisciplinary as well as specialist roles of curators today and sets a standard for the relationship between curators and the public.

Regardless of their situation, curators have distinctive responsibilities that focus upon: 1) the interpretation, study, care, and development of the collection, and 2) the materials, concepts, exhibitions, and other programs central to the identity of their museum. Because of their direct responsibilities for the collection and their role in the development of interpretive material, curators are ambassadors who represent their institution in the public sphere. (p. 3)

In addition to acting as a public ambassador, the first of the “Curator’s Values” that the document discusses is to serve the public good “by contributing to and promoting learning, inquiry, and dialogue, and by making the depth and breadth of human knowledge available to the public” (p. 6). Furthermore, they should, “advocate and provide for public access to and use of the collection” (p. 5). CurCom’s “Code of Ethics,” emphasizes the public role of curators revealing the Committee’s awareness and response to the shifting relationship between the museum and society and the new context within which curator’s must work to gain broad public relevance.

With the demise of what Jennifer Barrett (2010) calls the “dispenser of knowledge” role there has arisen a set of alternative and expanded curatorial responsibilities and roles. In her article, “Curatorship as Social Practice,” Christina Kreps (2003) argues that along with the intellectual content of exhibitions and publications:

Curators are also educators and may be charged with creating educational programming based on their research and scholarship. Depending on the size of a museum and number of staff members, curators may perform administrative tasks related to running a museum. In fact, curatorial work has become so encompassing that it is now difficult to define precisely what a curator is and does. (p. 311-312)

Kreps writes that because of this breakdown in traditional roles there is an opportunity to reflect on the relationship of curators to society. She states, “What we need is an approach to curatorial work that recognizes the interplay of objects, people, and societies, and expresses these relationships in social and cultural contexts” (p. 312). Through Kreps’ study of Native American museological practices and her understanding of comparative museology she demonstrates how curating is a social practice and is produced relative to unique cultural contexts, none of which can be universally applied. Kreps argues that curatorial practice should be re-modeled according to the museum’s unique cultural environment, and in so doing offer more “appropriate curation” of cultural resources that communities themselves value and have an interest in preserving (p. 53).

Jennifer Barrett (2010) includes Kreps (2003) idea of appropriate curation in her discussion of three alternative curatorial roles: cultural powerbroker, facilitator and appropriate participant. The last role is drawn from Kreps’ work. In the power broker role curators act as project managers who create partnerships and connections that result in the production of an exhibit. Barrett states that in the second role, “The curator has to become a facilitator, both within the community of museum professionals and in his/her relationship to the public.” In order to fulfill the multiple facets of museum operations that curators are expected to understand today they can no longer dispense knowledge but must “negotiate competing agendas and beliefs.” Finally, as an appropriate participant or orchestrator of participatory engagement, curators make, “The move towards a bottom-up, people-centered approach,” that involves, “the

intended beneficiaries in all phases of a project, especially in the decision making process” (p. 152). Barrett states that this strategy capitalizes on local knowledge and also insures that local people have a greater stake in the project.

Barrett (2010) argues that after decades of questioning and critiquing the role of the curator, the 21st century has seen the “return of the curator.” She questions what the appropriate role of this “newly restored curator” should be. In the art museum context, Barrett argues that much more than project management skills are required to communicate with different publics. She suggests that the greatest potential for curators lies in orchestrating exhibits in which different perceptions of material are all displayed simultaneously in order to convey openness to interpretation (p. 156). Barrett ultimately argues that today, “It is certainly possible for curators to be barriers to ‘the public,’ but they are not inherently so.” Innovative curatorial practices are representing museums as public intellectuals, increasing the effectiveness and openness of museums by uniting their specialist and intellectual agenda with the ethos of democratic participation and contestation (p. 162).

Chapter 3: Methods

The goal of this research is to identify and describe emerging trends in practice among art curators who work to expand community access to art museums. Curators were selected for this study based on their employment at art institutions with significant institutional commitment to 1) community engagement and/or 2) social justice. These two priorities were considered institutionally significant if they were central or related to the majority of art museum statements available via their web site (See Table 1 on the next page.) Data considered during the selection process can be found in (Appendix 1.) Two art institutions in New York City and two in San Francisco Bay Area were chosen based on the criteria and time and travel opportunities: the BMW Guggenheim Lab, The Bronx Museum of Arts, The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, and the Oakland Museum of California.

Curators at the selected art institutions were contacted by phone or email in order to request an on-site interview. On-site interviews were preferred so that they could be conducted in the context of an institutional visit and allow viewing curatorial projects, and neighborhood context in-person. The interview format was semi-structured and open ended which gave curators a chance to guide the conversation and for a more natural dialogue to occur. During interview appointments verbal consent to record the conversation was obtained from curators. Verbal and written consent was obtained from all subjects and all subjects were informed of their right to review all material representing their opinion in the study. Interviews were recorded using a digital recording program set up on a computer and placed between interviewer and interviewee.

Table 1. Art Institution Website Statements About Identity

BMW Guggenheim Lab, NYC	The Bronx Museum of the Arts, NYC	Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA	Oakland Museum of California, CA
<p>Community center and public gathering space</p> <p>Inspire public discourse</p> <p>Online social communities</p> <p>Addresses issues of contemporary urban life through programs and public discourse</p> <p>Solutions for city life</p> <p>Exploring notions of individual and collective comfort and the urgent need for environmental and social responsibility</p>	<p>Connects diverse audiences to the urban experience</p> <p>Reflecting the borough's dynamic communities</p> <p>Serving the culturally diverse populations of the Bronx and the greater New York metropolitan area</p> <p>The Bronx Museum of the Arts maintains a permanent collection of 20th and 21st-century works by artists of African, Asian, and Latin American ancestry. Additionally, the Museum collects works by artists for whom the Bronx has been critical to their artistic practice and development</p>	<p>Dynamic convergence of artists... and community to sustain multiple levels of participation, propel short and long term social change, and insure that live arts and living artists are vital to society</p> <p>Embrace the challenge of working with people from different backgrounds, with different life experiences and alternative points of view... Mutual trust, respect and an openness to other perspectives, even if it makes us uncomfortable at the moment</p> <p>Contemporary artists that come to YBCA... are interested in exposing and challenging some of the inequities that exist in the contemporary world and making us think more deeply about issues of social justice, creating change and striving for a better world... provoke us to some sort of change in behavior or action... involves a confrontation, or an encounter, with reality and even truth</p>	<p>Connect communities to the cultural and environmental heritage of California</p> <p>Public dialogue</p> <p>The Museum's advisory councils work with our Education Department and support us in our mission to stay connected to the Bay Area's many diverse communities that reflect community needs and cultural interests</p> <p>Explore innovative ways to engage audiences... Nurture inquisitiveness, and support the creativity of artists and the public</p>

Interview questions addressed their professional background, curatorial roles and collaborative partnerships within their art institution, and current projects and ideological motivations for their curatorial practice. For example, the key question in the interview script was, “How does your curatorial practice invite the participation of diverse local communities?” If curators asked for more context to the question, more specific questions were asked, “Do you work with artists who do this themselves and facilitate their efforts? Do you collaborate with education and outreach on these issues? Is this something you do yourself through creating partnerships with trusted community organizations or leaders?” The complete set of open ended, semi-structured interview questions, can be found in Appendix 2. Through recording and analyzing the answers to these interview questions the goal was to identify a range of curatorial approaches to engaging communities in art museums and indicate curatorial trends emerging from institutions that focus on community engagement and social justice

After interviews were completed income and demographic data was collected about the neighborhoods that each art institution is located in. This information has been used to create short introductions to the income and demographics in each art institution’s neighborhood. Data was gathered from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey and the NYC Income Map created by the Center for Urban Pedagogy. The census data will provide additional context for curator responses about engaging communities.

The technique used for coding data was finding key words and concepts in the transcripts of the four interviews. Key words and concepts about curatorial practices were cross-referenced between all interviews to find similar ideas and themes in the data. The identified themes in the data were the basis for the analysis and findings.

Chapter 4: Case Studies

The BMW Guggenheim Lab

On Museum Mile in New York City, between 88th and 89th Street, stands the iconic Frank Lloyd Wright building that is home to the Guggenheim Museum of modern and contemporary art. The Guggenheim sits across the street from the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir in Central Park in an area of the city commonly referred to as the Upper East Side. In August 2011 a small pop-up satellite of the Guggenheim took over a lot at the intersection of Houston St. and 2nd Avenue. The BMW Guggenheim Lab (The Lab) space designed by Tokyo architecture firm Atelier Bow-Wow acts as an “umbrella,” in the words of one of the founding curators of the BMW Guggenheim Lab and a Guggenheim Assistant Curator of Architecture. Underneath this umbrella and throughout the city for about two months, Lab programming covered a range of topics all connected to the theme, “Confronting Comfort.” The Lab will travel to a total of 9 major cities in 6 years and be housed by a total of 3 structures over that period. Already there has been a considerable difference in neighborhoods spanned by the Lab’s first location.



Aletheia Wittman (Photographer). (2011). *Gathering at the Guggenheim Lab*.

In the census tract in which the Guggenheim Museum sits 97% of the local population is white, while other census categories, Black, Hispanic, Asian and other, are represented equally with 1%. In 2006 the median annual income of households in the Upper East Side was

\$178,000, 231% of the median citywide income. Though the immediate neighborhood of the Guggenheim is resided in by very privileged New Yorkers, the museum attracts countless tourists from all over the world as a destination of cultural renown. However, the Lab curator interviewed for this research felt that locating the Lab in a different part of the city was important in order to do real outreach for the art, design and ideas that they, co-curators Maria Nicanor and David Van der Leer, wish to discuss – those relating to urban experiences, city design and public participation among others. The Lab is located in a very different and relatively more diverse neighborhood than the Guggenheim. In the census tract that includes Houston St and 2nd Avenue, the area's population has been estimated to be 56% white, 12% Black, 19% Hispanic, 8% Asian and 5% other. However, if you cross Houston St. to the south and go a couple blocks toward Chinatown the Hispanic and Asian populations jump to around 30% each. The median annual income in The Lab's neighborhood is \$35,600, 46% of the city wide median income.

The curator recognizes that the new location of the space has an impact on those who attend the space. The people that use the space now would never have come to the Guggenheim and the types of conversations that were possible at the Lab would also not have been common at the Guggenheim. David and Maria intentionally wanted to create the right environment that would facilitate the kinds of participatory discussions that they wished to host there. They both wanted to run programs outside the museum for some time to connect more deeply with their areas of specialization, architectural history and urban studies. The curator considers it easy for museum education and outreach to be fake gestures without real intention behind them. "If you really want to be talking to people go to where they are and that is exactly what this is," she states of the Lab project. Today with social media, she says, you don't need a big or iconic

building but you need to harness the self-organizing power that already exists through the Internet and invite those communities to interact in physical spaces.

Maria and David have driven the creation of project from the beginning and it has been a very personal project for them both. Instead of institutional will it has been individual will that has seen this new project through, however, the curator states, they are trying to create a new model that can co-exist with the more traditional one, the Museum Mile Guggenheim. The curator acknowledges that money plays a major role in providing the opportunity and support to pursue such a unique model. In the case of the Lab, BMW came to Maria and David and asked for a project proposal with the request that it be global in scope and about cities. They proposed their idea, got BMW's approval and were asked to make it even bigger. After Maria and David initiated the project they assembled a small team of collaborators with backgrounds in urban issues, design and environmental activism.

Of her role as a curator and of curation in general, the Lab curator feels that curators are no longer about staging passive spaces and solely about checklists for exhibitions, but that curators need to think outside the box. Of particular importance to her practice is being responsive to reality or "what is happening in our surroundings." She refers to Occupy Wall Street, a movement at its peak activity in Manhattan in mid October, simultaneous to the Lab. "Why aren't we addressing that?," she asks. She is very adamant that museums and curators must not keep to an ivory tower.

I am an art historian by training but I find myself getting more and more far away from the traditional art historical discourse and doing projects like this that I could actually be doing from City Hall or from a government NGO or something, which is something I would have never thought of. So for me it is more the making things useful. There is a

need for theory and there is a need to ground your language but I think you need to come down to talk about other things.

She goes on to talk about a recent United Nation's sustainability conference that she and her co-curator were invited to speak at. They spoke about ownership and empowerment in communities, as well as communication and cohesion in cities. The curator emphasizes that this is the type of curator she wants to be, however she is aware that curation has hierarchical and status connotations in a museum context. She feels the power of the title "curator" as someone in an organization who is a curator in her own right, does not answer to a higher office, but is referred to as an "assistant."

Despite Maria and David's efforts to maintain a bottom-up approach to participation and community engagement at the Lab, there have been challenges along the way. A series was created called "What's Next" meant to address the future that communities desired for the space after the Lab left in October. The curator says that this series was created in response to neighbors who came to them and asked what was going to happen after they left and questioned their transitory presence in the neighborhood. The team took this as a criticism and set out to create "What's Next?" A dialogue was started through this event about what community members would like to see happen with the space and they later set up role playing scenarios where local residents and community leaders would role-play different groups who wanted to develop the land. The final event incorporated presenters and speakers who were neighbors of the space and to whom the team reached out to. The curator states that at one of these events someone stood up and told them it was bad that they were going and that if they really wanted to help the community then they would leave the structure when they left. The criticism was valid to her. Though she was encouraged that they were still wanted in the space she was also

frustrated that, as a cultural team that was part of a mobile project, they did not have the ability to make any real decisions about what happened there when they left. They could organize people while they were there, but the real decisions had to be made and supported by the local communities.

The curator still feels that there was an important value to their Lab project at Houston and 2nd Ave despite their limitations of time and ability to make the dreams that neighbors had for the space into a reality. In this situation, curators facilitated discussion, encouraged comfort in the museum space, responded to issues of the local surroundings and empowered participants to find creative solutions to the problems in their city.

I think projects like this make sense in a poetic way, which is what museums and art and culture are all about. They (the Lab programs) are not only talks about cities they are talks about people and social situations and that is certainly very poetic and creative, which is something great about a cultural institution. You can think creatively. You have a certain poetic license to be crazy once and awhile.

The curator goes on to state that when support and funding align, museums and curators can respond to reality quickly, and, unlike larger scale institutions, are positioned to encourage dialogue, process and creation in relation to the subject or object, in this case the city. Through Maria and David's initiative and funding through BMW, curator and consultant expertise converge with community expertise and experience at the Lab. Inviting ownership and participation in the art museum space was used as a way to encourage greater ownership of neighborhood and city spaces themselves and allowed them to engage a broader range of communities who would not have come to the Guggenheim.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts

The Bronx Museum of the Arts (BxMA) is located at 165th St. and Grand Concourse in a district referred to as High Bridge or South Concourse. If the BMW Guggenheim location represents a distinct departure from the affluent neighborhood of the Guggenheim Museum then BxMA's neighborhood represents equally distinct shift in income and demographic representation. In the immediate area of BxMA the annual median income was \$27,000 in 2006, 35% of the city wide median income. Significantly, the census tract in which the BxMA resides is a minority majority neighborhood.

There are 0% white populations represented, but 44% Black, 49% Hispanic, 4% Asian and 3% other populations represented. Census categories famously aggregate very diverse groups within their ethnic and racial categories, and the Bronx is a good example of how within these basic census



Family Affair at the Bronx Museum of the Arts
[Photograph]. (2011). Retrieved May 11, 2012, from:
<http://www.thebronxjournal.com/?p=6382>.

categories there is a great diversity in residents and the cultures they represent. Sergio Bessa, the BxMA Director of Curatorial and Educational Programs, states that the diverse and low-income communities in the Bronx influence how the museum thinks about its purpose and value all the time.

Sergio has been working at BxMA for around 9 years. When he first arrived he was the Director of Education, but in 2006 he became the Director of Programs, the head of both

education and curatorial departments. During the 2006 restructuring he and the new Executive Director decided to merge the curatorial and education departments. Sergio says that, as a small museum that has its focus on engaging communities, it made more sense to organize the institution so that staff in exhibitions and education would always know what the other was doing and collaborate. During the financial downturn it was particularly hard to find funding for curatorial positions and they had more luck funding educational positions. The museum was forced to downsize its curation department but has slowly been adding positions back into the organization. Sergio feels that the repor between education and curation is essential to finding creative strategies to break down complex ideas for their audiences.

The priority of finding creative communication strategies is of primary concern to BxMA and Sergio because the Bronx is a very low-income area where there are also a lot of immigrant communities. Sergio states that the mission of BxMA reflects how they see their relationship with communities in the Bronx.

You have to depart form this point that museums are not priorities for the average Bronxite. So you have to make it vital. You have to make it important. You have to make people understand and value art because their priorities are to pay their rent and to put the kids in school. So, in that, it's a very different mission *vis-à-vis* the communities here.

Unlike the Guggenheim Museum, Sergio says, people from communities in the Bronx are not as familiar with art history or museums and are not coming because they have a basis in art experiences like those that attend the Guggenheim. They are not coming for “more,” as Sergio says, but to build the basis of those art experiences, which gives BxMA a very different perspective on communicating their value.

Sergio recalls that, as a youth in Brazil, it was derogatory to say that something belonged in a museum, but today it seems to him that museums have become fashionable, hot commodities. He remains critical of using education as a marketing tool to bring people to museums. At the same time he thinks they are taking advantage of their cache through reaching beyond their traditional functions to respond to broader communities, even international communities. Through SMARTpower, a arts and cultural initiative of the Department of State to encourage diplomacy, BxMA selects and sends 15 U.S. artists abroad to work on community-based projects with local artists and youth in order to foster cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. Sergio thinks that projects like this, which keep art museums in-tune with world affairs and encourage the self-mobilization of people to take control of their own lives, are ways to expand the usage of the root of curator, “care.”

When you look at the state of the world and all these very difficult situations in communities there is a huge need for being taken care of. So of course you do not want to send a curator to resolve the problems in Tunisia! But I think along those lines. That we, have to more and more, museums have to become a little bit more nimble.

Sergio looks at the changes in the Brooklyn Museum over the years and sees what they have done there as saying to communities, “This is your place.” He thinks that curatorial work that communicates this message is what is needed today.

Sergio organizes art exhibitions as part of his job at BxMA, and he was an artist for a while in Brazil, but his PhD was in Education. His dissertation was on Swedish, Brazilian born, artist Oyvind Faalstrom who worked with language and image, emphasizing the visuality of language. For Sergio, the two, language and visual expression have always been linked and it has affected his perspectives on education and the visual arts. For example, he says, linking the language of the viewer to explanations of complex art and ideas in a simple way can allow

audiences to see the material in a different way. He considers this practice for label copy is very important. He considers the communication of complex art and ideas to be an art or poetic in and of itself in which the audience is central.

When organizing exhibitions for the BxMA Sergio says that the shows that are selected should be multi-layered, with many “points of entrance.” Along with creating a framework for audiences to understand the ideas to which artists are referring in their artwork, it is also important to Sergio to choose artists who deal with multi-dimensional topics that many communities in the Bronx have experience with and could connect to. For example, he brings up the Juan Downey retrospective that began at BxMA in February. Juan Downey was a Chilean artist working with video in the 70’s in South America in cooperation with Amazonian indigenous tribes there and drew inspiration from their culture. Downey was also an architect who played with the idea of invisible architectures, or the world as a network of structures. Sergio states that Downey’s work can be made simple enough to engage an elementary school kid, but are complicated enough to invite conversations about space and deconstruction for college students.

Sergio is also organizing a show of Martin Wong’s work, a Chinese American from the West Coast, who moved to the Lower East Side in the 80’s and eventually died of aids at the height of the aids crisis. Sergio is also trying to secure more work by Wong for the BxMA’s permanent collection. Sergio says that the environment of the Lower East Side in the 80’s was similar to a period in the Bronx’s history where drugs and crime made for a different and more dangerous urban culture. Sergio states that, as an accomplished painter, a gay man, and a minority, there are many topics in an exhibition of Wong’s work that could appeal to different

communities in the Bronx. An upcoming show in 2013 will be about a community-based collective, The Young Lords, who were making artistic interventions and statements in the 60's and 70's. Most members of the group were Puerto Rican living in the Bronx and Harlem at a time when the City of New York was almost bankrupt and city services were being cut. Sanitation services weren't coming regularly and they conducted demonstrations where they piled up trash in the middle of the street. School lunches were cut and mothers and grandmothers in the neighborhood organized so that children at schools could still have lunch, and The Young Lords contributed to efforts to support the schools. Everything they did was to call attention to the poor state of the neighborhoods. At one point they were derided as a gang, some were radical and ended up in jail. Showing an exhibition about this collective will bring up important Bronx history and start discussions about it, says Sergio.

Public programs at BxMA also reflect the ways that the museum connects art to lived experience of the Bronx's communities. A series called Bronx Stories invites artists to tell their Bronx Stories through their own art by connecting with art in current exhibitions. After artist performances, guests are encouraged to take the microphone and tell their own stories about the Bronx. While they have the floor they can say anything they want. Sergio says the idea for the program came from a young woman, a student at the time Sergio told her she could help put together the program, and she now has been hired by the museum to run it. Sergio says that this program has been a big success. Sergio has developed curatorial strategies that connect BxMA to life in the Bronx through curatorial collaborations with the education department, responding to communities and their experiences by supporting programs such as Bronx Stories, and choosing multi-layered artwork that can communicate across multiple community interests.

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

On the West Coast, the second most populated metropolitan area, after Los Angeles, is the Bay Area. This region includes San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose as well as the smaller cities such as Berkeley. Near the downtown core of San Francisco, off of Market and Mission Streets, sits a conglomeration of art institutions; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), The Contemporary Jewish Museum, The Museum of the African Diaspora, the Museum of Craft and Folk Art, and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Yerba Buena has spaces that host dance, film, music and visual artists, and an interdisciplinary way of presenting arts and cultural practices. The YBCA is in a census district where the median annual income is \$112,328, whereas the citywide median is \$71,304, and within this tract there is a 58% White and 28% Asian majority population. However, in a tract immediately to the west of YBCA the neighborhood has a median income of \$23,099. Within this tract census data shows that racial and ethnic groupings are differently distributed, with Asian populations at 42%, White populations at 26%, Black populations at 15% and Hispanic populations at 11%. In this area, there are clear disparities, high-income populations are living immediately next to much lower income populations. Betti-Sue Hertz, Director of Visual Arts and Head Curator for Visual Arts at YBCA, has a history of considering how arts and cultural spaces can build a relationship with and become relevant to low-income populations.

Betti-Sue began her career as an artist in New York City and then worked for 17 years as the director of two exhibition spaces in districts in the South Bronx that were some of the poorest in the country. The primary populations that lived there were immigrant groups from Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as African Americans who had been living in the area for a

long time. At the same time as she worked in the South Bronx she continued her practice as an artist in SOHO in Lower Manhattan and she felt as if she was moving between two different worlds. The exhibition spaces she directed in the South Bronx were not community-based. They featured the work of professional artists, many of them representative ethnically and culturally of populations living in the Bronx, as well as international artists and White American artists. The people who would come to these exhibition spaces, however were from communities in the Bronx and were not informed about art history or conceptual art ideas. From this experience Betti-Sue began to primarily work with themes of more relevance to the constituency attending the art spaces. For example, she says, mental health, violence, style, literacy, and education. Group shows would comment on these themes or be ethnically or culturally specific. Her practice addressed cultural studies, and political and social themes, but not necessarily activism. After her time in NYC she moved to California to work as the first contemporary art curator the San Diego Museum of Art, an experience, she says, that was quite the opposite of working in the Bronx. Her job in San Diego was to link contemporary art and themes to the encyclopedic collection at the museum, and present art within a larger continuum. At YBCA she feels that she has arrived somewhere between her experiences in the Bronx and in San Diego.

YBCA does not collect artwork but, rather, tries to link visual arts across disciplines and expand expectations of art to encompass work outside of a canonical lineage. In this sense, it is not a conventional museum. YBCA also emphasizes the social context of art production and has a history of art exhibitions that address socially and politically left topics. However, Betti-Sue doesn't see the work she does at YBCA as social justice work. Rather, the focus of her practice is on the relationship between art and audiences. In the past she has organized exhibitions in which there are event-based elements that require the audience to participate in order for the

work to exist, though that is not central to her practice. YBCA does not have an education department, but Betti-Sue collaborates with the community engagement department which is focused on events, programming and participatory engagement. The curatorial department,



Alberto Pizzoli/ Getty Images (Photographer). (2012). *Audience as Subject, Part 2* [Photograph], Retrieved May 15, 2012, from: <http://www.dailycal.org/2012/02/22/art->

Betti-Sue states, is responsible for the intellectual programming of the exhibitions. Unlike the community engagement department, Betti-Sue also feels that her job is to cultivate a deep understanding of the artist's work, the ideas that it is connected to and how they are connected to the larger field of ideas. With this knowledge, she says curators are in the ideal position to gather

together experts on the subject to discuss the ideas of the exhibition at a high level. The community engagement department, due to the nature of their role in the museum, might not have the time to cultivate a depth of study on the subject. By sharing this information with the community engagement department, a well-studied and considered interpretation of the artwork and ideas in exhibitions can be incorporated holistically into other YBCA programming .

Betti-Sue feels that her practice might be seen as relatively traditional because of her central interest in the artwork itself. She calls herself very object oriented as opposed to the experience oriented or social practice oriented practice that she feels many younger curators are cultivating today. Social practice has existed for a long time, she reflects, even though young generations of curators seem to be turning to it as something new. She recalls that this practice was what she was engaged with more directly at the beginning of her career. Today, she feels that the artwork and the object, more than the artist, is the most important thing. After all, most

people come into exhibits and what they see is the artwork. She feels that displaying the work in an engaging way is important to building a viewer connection with it. She states that she is the most interested in experiences of objects that are not just ephemeral or transitory, but physical and invite cognitive effects not just emotional or experiential. She feels that, rather than museums moving away from objects today, museums are adding more and more functions. Because the total functions of museums have expanded, the objects role has relatively decreased in relation to the whole, but it is still as important and central as ever. Today, she says, audiences expect a level of interactivity and digital technology and social media can provide this engagement. However, she feels that the role of curator is also transforming and expanding. Curators today are moving toward professionals who stage and produce plays or experiences, instead of working directly with objects. Though not for everyone, Betti-Sue feels that the most enjoyable and important role for her is working with objects and exploring the relationship between these objects and audiences.

Along with the centrality of objects in her practice, Betti-Sue uses her exhibitions to address and attract a range of publics, especially those that might not usually be part of YBCA's core audience. Her most recent exhibition, *Audience as Subject Parts 1 and 2*, was inspired by conversations that happen at YBCA all the time about its relationship to the public and engaging audiences. Because this was so important to discourses within YBCA, Betti-Sue felt that expanding the dialogue to include artists and YBCA audiences than the internal dialogue would expand. The shows are also an expression of a philosophy Betti-Sue holds about arts organization; that the internal self of an institution should match its external self. For example, she says, if you have an organization where only white people work there but you want to do programming for people from Latin America then there is a problem. If an organization wants

to do diverse programming than the staff should be diverse. Betti-Sue tries to carry out this philosophy by putting together exhibitions that will have different core audiences. Earlier this year she organized a show of contemporary artwork from India. As they predicted, a core audience of those interested in contemporary art not widely seen in the U.S. came to see the show, but many people from Indian communities also came to see the show, and many had not known about YBCA before. In addition, those interested in India as a nation, a huge player on the world stage economically, would have also found the show serving their interests. Through this show, Betti-Sue states, YBCA expanded its audience.

In the summer of 2012 Betti-Sue will open an exhibition that she feels aligns much more closely with a direct and political social justice message. The show will be about the Occupy Bay area movement. The show will be about bringing people to YBCA who have been connected with the movement, a movement that has been part of a nation wide indictment of institutions that have stood in the way of social justice, particularly economic inequality. The curatorial department at YBCA will create the show from scratch and continue in the lineage of YBCA shows that are directly political like a previous show before Betti-Sue arrived which included photography addressing the Black Panther movement and contemporary artwork responding to the Panthers. She states that the Occupy exhibit is not activism but does align YBCA with a leftist politics. As the example of the Occupy Exhibition shows, Betti-Sue feels that her role at YBCA centers on object oriented scholarship and audience experiences. Yet, she also has cultivated a multidimensional practice through exhibiting artists working from within diverse cultures, responding to broad social issues and addressing social justice themes relevant across many Bay Area communities.

The Oakland Museum of California

Across San Francisco Bay from YBCA is Oakland. Many more districts in Oakland are lower income than those of central San Francisco. There is also a great deal more ethnic and racial diversity. On the west side of Lake Merritt, and right outside downtown Oakland, sits the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA.) The census tract where OMCA is located has a median annual income of \$63,913 and the census tract directly adjacent, which includes downtown Oakland, has a median annual income of \$17,349. In OMCA's district the population is 26% White, 5% Black, 4% Hispanic and 62% Asian, and 2% identified as other. However, this population varies dramatically within nearby neighborhoods. For example, in Oakland's Chinatown white populations drop to 3% and Asian populations jump to 92%, west of Broadway black populations are consistently above 50%, and across Lake Merritt to the East, Hispanic populations jump to 25%. OMCA is situated in a broadly diverse environment as well as amongst many neighborhoods that could be considered low income. Amongst so many different communities that span many backgrounds, senior curator Rene de Guzman has sought to use collections, exhibits and programming in ways that invite local communities to feel ownership of OMCA's arts and cultural resources.

Rene's career started as an artist in Berkeley in the late 80's and early 90's at the height of the multicultural movement, the aids crisis, and the censorship of the National Endowment for the Arts. His artistic practice was not political at the time but due the socio-political atmosphere of that period where art and political activism were so closely connected, he began collaborating with a Filipino artistic community and got involved with artist activism around freedom of

expression and censorship. Rene then went on to curate at YBCA at helped build up their reputation for connecting progressive politics and high aesthetics. This reputation distinguished YBCA amongst museum, because most thought those two areas were irreconcilable. Rene has carried on this unique interest in both progressive politics and aesthetics to OMCA.

Rene has continued address the socio-political through his collecting practice at OMCA. He is responsible for bringing a collection of thousands of political posters to OMCA. These posters, the largest percentage of which originated in the Bay area, are available to look at on OMCA's online catalogue. Rene also was behind acquiring Sam Durant's work, a bronze monument of the Huey P. Newton batan chair. The bronze chair, a monument to the Black Panther Party, is an interactive piece that visitors to OMCA galleries can sit in. Along with collecting locally and politically significant artworks, Rene has supported contemporary such as the artist group who created Question Bridge: Black Men. Question Bridge is initially being shown both at OMCA and the Brooklyn Museum and is a project that brings together questions and responses by a numerous black men about the construction of black male identity in the USA. The work is comprised of multiple screens set up in a semi circle in a darkened room where vacant chairs complete the circle. The video screens alternately show black men answering and asking questions of each other and viewers are invited to fill the vacant seats as active participants in the dialogue. The artists hope the work will contribute to abolishing the negative and damaging social constructions of black male identity as well as show the diversity of the black male experience. Rene is very proud of the work and happy with how it has been presented. He states that the group of 4 artists approached him with the idea and together they conceptualized the idea of having the project be national in scope. Soon the project will also be in Atlanta and Salt Lake City as well.

Rene sees his role at OMCA as not only involved in collecting and bringing in contemporary artists but also as a creator of participatory events that involve artists, communities and museum assets; space, gardens and collections. Rene has gotten to exercise this area of his practice through The Oakland Standard, an arts participation project funded by a grant from the Irvine Foundation. Rene and a small team of staff members created a website and a blog for The Oakland Standard and they regularly schedule events and happenings at OMCA. Because it is a unique and separate project, Rene states that The Oakland Standard functions from both within and outside the museum Bureaucracy. Because of this level of autonomy, Rene says that the Oakland Standard group can be more nimble and responsive with programming.

Projects hosted by the Oakland Standard have included Home Movie Day, a partnership with a film conservation collective that hosts events where people can come to learn how to care for film materials that are often not collected by museums. Through one of these home movie days footage that showed a middle class African American family living in west Oakland in the 1930's was recovered. The footage was an African American man's travelogue as he worked on trains. Rene and his team then hired a jazz musician to compose a score and perform it with this never before seen footage. This event was particularly important for Rene as an intersect between art and history, which are both central to OMCA, and as a chance for first-person stories about and experiences of California to be highlighted. Another project organized by the Oakland Standard team is "Chairs of the Board." The project is a literal board where it first was a space where people were invited to draw and decorate large blank canvas. Then chair hooks were added at different spaces on the board so visitors could grab and replace chairs from the wallboard as needed to sit in OMCA's entrance courtyard. Later local mural artists were invited to come paint the board and incorporate recent issues like Occupy Oakland as well as images

taken from OMCA’s collection. The mural painting itself was an event and DJ’s played, dancing started and a local food vendor provided the snacks. Rene says the goal of these events and interactions with the board were meant to create a “convivial environment” and empower creativity within the community by granting permission to make artwork at a central OMCA location. To utilize OMCA’s collection once again they hosted a Political Poster Jam where local DJs played music and workshops were held by local artists on how to make posters

These things are event based and they start to resemble festivals; community events that they are much more used to coming to than a museum space. If it is social or taps into social justice then there are a lot of signals that this is an event I might feel comfortable at.

Rene says the turnout has encompassed a diverse range of people, and the goal has been to empower people through art participation.

One of the examples Rene emphasizes from the Oakland Standard’s recent history of projects is April Ful’s Night. On April 1st, 2011 the Oakland Standard had intended to host a food event with a local food group that addressed a political agenda and when they started discussing the event the Arab Spring was occurring. The conversation then turned to addressing how to connect the events to Middle Eastern communities



Shaun Roberts (Photographer). (2011). *UC Berkeley Students Listening to Spoken Word Artists, April Ful’s Night* [Photograph], Retrieved May 12, 2012, from: <http://museumca.org/theoaklandstandard/april-fuls-night>

and have a dialogue about the events of the Arab Spring. The group began to work with local Middle Eastern groups by contacting thought leaders and community figures to create a

grassroots participatory event. There was a panel discussion from local leaders, each of whom represented a different interest or group, as well as pan-middle eastern music and food from countries in the Middle East. Poetry readings and a skype conversation with an artist collective from Egypt were also highlights of the event.

For Rene, museums today need to be more clear about their public value. This starts through modifying museum behavior to match other cultural practices, Rene states. Rene sees the Oakland Standard projects as invitations for communities to come to OMCA, use it and feel comfortable. But, he says, it doesn't do anyone any good if you invite them to come with no reason for them to stay. It is one thing to diversify audiences, but another to articulate what they are coming for. Rene thinks that if you invite people to your museum you must truly have reason to believe that people would benefit by experiencing what you have to offer them. Rene thinks the participatory art programs are ways to show communities, "what you have." For example, if you have a great educational program, tell people you have a community asset that they can take advantage of. In the case of the Political Poster Jam, the Oakland Standard team wanted to communicate that the collection represents the widest diversity of people and that the museum has their material, is preserving it and making it available for everyone online. Rene thinks that in order to inspire and engage people you also need to relate to them. This is where he sees creative communities playing a large role as collaborators. The events they host require lots of artistry and creativity and the Oakland Standard maintains a list on their website of all the partnerships they have established with creative groups during projects. Rene reflect that without being able to confer and collaborate with the creativity available in local communities it would not be as easy to relate to the broader range of communities they would like to use OMCA.

Rene believes that curators have a very useful role to play today. He is aware of the power and authority connoted by the curatorial title, but feels that essentially the word is based in custom and nothing concrete. He also acknowledges that curators are often the stumbling blocks to initiative like those he is engaged in at OMCA, and that they are often the naysayers in the scenario. He feels that the dilemma starts with the fact that the title, curator, is first thought to refer to care of objects. If the understanding of the word can expand to encompass audiences, a paradigm shift, then the understanding of the role will change. A larger model for this paradigm shift can be found in museums themselves. Rene thinks that for years museums knew they had to shift more focus to audiences, but when changes started happening they didn't involve curators as much as education departments so the shifts were always incomplete and ultimately failed. Rene identifies the problem further by referring to conservation. Conservation is a straightforward job without considering the public, but to think of this job as an end in and of itself prevents the full realization of the museum's purpose.

They have accused me of wanting to destroy stuff but there is a certain amount of wear and tear that will happen. One of my favorite sayings is 'The problem that railroads got into was that they thought that they were in the railroad business rather than the transportation business.' Losing sight of what their mission was, to get people from place to place, not to maintain the railroads. I think the same is true now of these considerations in museums.

Rene goes on to say that, no matter what position you hold in museums, your job should be about public engagement. As a public space, he states, that is your business, and what museums produce is public experiences. As a curator, Rene says that his role is uniquely about provoking discussion based in expertise, but it doesn't stop there. Rene sees curatorial expertise and content development as completely interconnected with the work he does in the Oakland Standard, communicating value and translating ideas into relatable and welcoming programs and events.

Together these roles result in sustaining the interest of diverse communities in the experiences available for them at OMCA.

Chapter 5: Analysis

Primary Findings: Emerging Curatorial Practices that Create Community Access to Art Museums

The four curators selected for this study are exceptional in the field, because their practices are operating from within art institutions or branches of institutions that have created an online identity that focuses on community engagement and/or the work of social justice. Curators within this sample of institutions were found to be utilizing a range of non-traditional, emerging trends in art curatorial community engagement as the methodology hypothesized. However, findings also indicate that all curators in this study retain core, traditional curatorial functions; specializing in caring for artwork and developing art exhibition interpretation and displays. Both traditional curatorial practices and community engagement practices, enacted in each case study in very different ways, were important to curator participants as an indicator of their professional success. Interview responses also suggest that their sense of success was gauged by their sense of integration into broader art museum and field-wide goals of creating expanded access for communities within their institution.

Interview data was coded and sorted into the ten most often identified curatorial practices. Practices numbered 3 through 10 are emerging curatorial practices in community engagement, because they move beyond core roles, but are common among all or some of their fellow curators in the study. Curators:

1. Use discourses of specialists in the field of artistic production to develop exhibitions;
2. Care for and orchestrated the display of artwork, objects and/or collections;
3. Are involved in or planning exhibits and/or programs that address grassroots organizing or social justice movements;

4. Value responding to grassroots organizing and social justice movements as they happen;
5. Exhibit artists whose work comments on issues that relate to lived experiences of local communities;
6. Connect programming and exhibits to ideas of Place (shared meanings connected to a location, which imbue a space with value for one or more communities);
7. Use culturally familiar gathering and participation formats to promote comfort and participation
8. Invite communities to share their creativity and their experiences;
9. Collaborate with trusted community leaders on programs;
10. Provide communities with direct access and representation in art exhibition and program development.

These practices are also displayed in Table 1 and shown reading from left to right. Practices are listed with the most common and consistent practices first, followed by increasingly less used and experimental practices. The less common practices indicate the outer edge of the spectrum of curatorial practices within this sample of institutions and curators.

Table 1. Summary of Curatorial Practices 1 through 10. (Curators correspond with numbers 1-4 on the y-axis.)

	1. Use discourses of specialists in the field of ideas and artistic production	2. Care for the display of artwork, objects and/or collections	3. Planning exhibits or programs that address grassroots organizing or social justice movements	4. Value responding to grassroots organizing and social justice movements as they happen	5. Exhibit artists whose work comments on issues that relate to lived experiences of local communities
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	More centered on artists that show interdisciplinary range and big ideas in contemporary art
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1 continued. Summary of Curatorial Practices 1 through 10. (Curators correspond with numbers 1-4 on the y-axis.)

	6. Connected programming and exhibits to ideas of Place	7. Used culturally familiar gathering and participation formats	8. Communities invited to share their creativity and their experiences	9. Collaborated with trusted community leaders on programs	10. Community engagement and participation in exhibition and program development
1	Yes, the city, urban experiences of local and global city residents	Yes	Yes	Some, depending on program	Some, verbal/online feedback influenced program decisions
2	Yes, contemporary and historical experiences of the local urban neighborhood	Yes	Yes	Some, depending on program	No, position does not focus on this kind of engagement
3	No, not often used	No, position does not focus on visitor events like these	No, position does not focus on visitor events like these	No, position does not focus on this kind of engagement	No, position does not focus on this kind of engagement.
4	Yes, contemporary and historical experiences of the region and city	Yes	Yes	Some, depending on program	Some, community groups advised on main art gallery exhibit

The first five practices (see Table 1) are held in common to a high degree among curator participants. These first practices include such traditional practices as using specialized knowledge of art to develop interpretive content for exhibitions as well as caring for the physical display of art and objects. The edge of the spectrum of practices, at the bottom right of the table,

are relatively less used practices related to community engagement, such as providing direct community access to art exhibition and program development in the institution.

Data collected through interviews indicates that curators in museums focusing on community engagement and social justice issues are collaborating with those who lead or leading community engagement activities commonly associated with education, programming or community outreach departments. Data also reflects that emerging practices are often directly tied to traditional curatorial practices of art exhibition and interpretive content development. This suggests that art curators have the potential to contribute and lead skilled as well as unique community engagement functions within their institutions.

i) Curatorial Practices 3 & 4: Communicating Responsively, Communicating Responsibly

If communities are invited into art institutional spaces through programs and events, as one curator stated, then these art institutions must be able to offer consistently relevant resources in order to sustain their engagement. Four of the four curator participants felt that their exhibition practice should be responsive to the issues of concern in local communities and larger public movements that span many different communities. The Arab Spring and the Occupy Movements were often referred to as examples of important events that curators should be responding to. These movements are examples of the power of Web 2.0, public organizing, and co-creating platforms from which marginalized publics can speak. Giving voice to topics perceived to be important to many publics, such as the economy, entertainment, popular culture and local history as well as broader social concerns of inequality, poverty, and injustice were considered by curators to be thematic priorities for their institutions and for their professional practice. This practice relates to Christina Kreps (2003) idea that curatorial practice should interact with the

museum's unique cultural environment, and in so doing offer cultural resources that communities themselves value and have an interest in preserving (p. 53).

ii) Curatorial Practice 5: Artists with Socially Responsive Practices

In order to maintain a responsive pace to their exhibitions four of the four curators worked with or exhibited artists whose work acts as a commentary on issues that relate to the lived experiences of local communities, for example social justice or contemporary public discourses. Artwork that addresses contemporary social issues naturally suggests exhibitions and programming through which curators can interact with discourses that are familiar and relevant to non-traditional art museum audiences. Curator participants believe that individuals unfamiliar with art museum spaces can feel empowered to enter into art dialogues through artwork that has many points of entrance or layers of meaning, from the everyday to the conceptual. Working with artists whose work highlights the experiences of multiple communities, was a practice embraced by all curators in this study as way to expand community access and sustain regularly attending art audiences. Jennifer Barrett (2010) states that as a facilitator within the community of museum professionals and in their relationship with the public, curators allow conversations between ideas, artwork, and communities to emerge instead of dispensing knowledge. (p. 152) By organizing exhibits of artwork that addresses community issues curators engage in a conversation already started within communities and open up avenues for communities to access art through its relationship to their experiences.

iii) Curatorial Practice 6: Connecting through Place

For the Bronx Museum of the Arts and the Oakland Museum of California, collecting policies and exhibition programming is centered on artists whose work is from, or relatable to, a geographic area or neighborhood space shared among local communities. Curator participants from both these institutions expressed that the basis of Place, a location imbued with shared meanings and significance among communities, can be a powerful tool for engaging local communities through a shared interest, and thus expand access to arts and cultural resources offered by their museums.

Place has also played a large role at the Guggenheim Lab, but in a different way. The curators of the Lab sought out a location with a connection to the daily life of people who did not attend the Guggenheim on Museum Mile. The curators then created programming that responded to the their space in the neighborhood, experiences of city life and community visions for what should happen in the space after the Lab left. In this situation, the curators harnessed the idea of Place in order to generate local community interest in design, discourses of city and urban spaces, and creative methods for shaping city spaces. Individual experiences and senses of Place in the urban environment were elevated to expert knowledge within the Guggenheim Lab alongside academic curator expertise on architecture and urban studies.

iv) Curatorial Practice 7: Culturally Familiar Community Engagement

A common theme in curator participant interviews was finding ways to relate art and ideas to local community interests and ways of participating in cultural activities in their own communities. Three of the four curator participants used community gathering and participation

formats such as music events, online games, dances, food fairs and festivals, so that communities did not feel intimidated by art museum spaces and events. Two curators directly referred to reaching out to trusted community figures in order to solicit community expertise and participation at events and programs. Curators expressed a desire to use familiar community activities and interactive models within their art institution in order to promote ownership for the resources offered by the institution. This perspective on community engagement aligns with research that examines the concept of cultural vitality as a concept defined by “creating, disseminating, validating and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life” (Jackson and Herranz, 2003, p. 16). The range of activities that communities reported as significant were wide ranging and findings emphasized that arts and cultural resources come from communities rather than being brought to communities (p. 16). Emerging curatorial community engagement practices look to community originating arts and cultural gathering and participation formats and respect that these formats are valuable sources of cultural vitality outside of arts institutions as well as a means of providing a sense of familiarity and welcome for communities.

v) Curatorial Practices 8-10: From Community Participation to Experiments in Direct Community Representation in Exhibition Planning

Inviting a representative range of individuals from local communities into art exhibitions planning and development is an emerging level of engagement as indicated through curator participant interviews. One curator was involved with permanent art exhibition development that involved community advisory groups from the beginning. Another curator was involved in implementing online opportunities for people to contribute ideas and responses that could then shape content and program development at the museum. Three curator participants were directly

involved and/or initiators of arts and cultural programming where community members were invited to share creativity, experience and knowledge as experts. Data indicates that curators in this study intend to include and attract diverse communities and non-traditional audiences into art museums through increasing levels of direct access to the art exhibition and content development process. However, they are using this practice the least relative to other emerging practices of engaging communities. Jennifer Barrett (2010) writes that appropriate participant curators engage in a bottom-up, people-centered approaches that involves communities in all phases of a project and especially in the decision making process (p. 152). Barrett states that this strategy capitalizes on local knowledge and insures that local people have a greater stake in the project. This level of community access is important as a strategy to counter the social exclusion of oppressed groups by advocating that communities within oppressed groups are represented in decisions about how arts and cultural resources can be useful and beneficial to their communities. (Harvey, 1998, Teslow, 2007, Sullivan Sorin 2007, Ladson Billings, 2006).

Secondary Findings: Factors that Influence Emerging Curatorial Practices in Community Engagement

By coding concepts and tracking their occurrence in interview transcripts, external factors emerged as significantly influential on curatorial community engagement practices. Professional background, institutional support, and funding sources all played a large role in situating each curator's relationship with community engagement activities. As hypothesized in the methodology of this research, interview responses indicate that the selected art institutions addressing community engagement and social justice do employ curators with a history of social practice, arts activism, and/or education. Curators in this study have been provided with support and funding for their practices that seek to create broader community access.

Table 2. Data on Professional Background, Institutional Support, & Grant Funding

	Professional Background	Institutional Support For Community Engagement Activities	Role played by Grant Support for Community Engagement Activities
1	Academic, Architectural and Urban Studies	Yes, but outside scope of priorities for curatorial positions. Most funding comes from outside institution.	Yes
2	Artist, PhD Education	Yes, but have not always been able to fund curatorial positions due to lack of external funding opportunities.	Not central
3	Artist (Social-Cultural-topics)	Yes, but not expected of curatorial priorities or role within institution, another department does much of this work	Not central
4	Artist (Filipino artist collective, arts activism for freedom of speech)	Yes, but some experimental engagement work is outside the scope of the institutions current priorities. Important funding for curator community engagement comes from outside the institution.	Yes

In one case study, the curator came from an academic background and had started a unique branch of her home institution in order to create opportunities for community engagement that her home institution did not currently offer. This curator was selected to be a participant in the study based on the community engagement activities and priorities of her own project, but had not been hired by her institution for this reason and did not have a history of professional experience in this area. When she and her fellow curator started to develop interests in strategies for expanding community access to art and ideas they knew they needed external funding support to implement new ideas. A large grant gave her the chance to operate from within her

home institution, but also separately from it. In this case study, it was the curator's will that supported the project and outside funding which sustained it. This data suggests that community engagement strategies and innovation can emerge from curators artistically trained or academically trained, but that a supportive environment must be attained through institution or funding support in order for emerging curatorial practices to grow.

i) Professional Background

One curator was an artist and went on to get his Ph.D. in Education. Before moving on to larger institutions, another curator was a visual artist experimenting with themes that she felt would be accessible to the communities that lived near the arts spaces she was running in the Bronx. Another was an artist who began to participate in arts collectives and arts activism during the multicultural movement in the late 1980's. Another came from an art and architecture historian background, but gradually realized that her interests in architecture and urban spaces were tied to things happening and existing outside of the museum, "where the people were," which has led to a highly social and creative practice.

Three curator participants were artists at the beginning of their career and then moved on to pursue curation. Each artist curator came to work at their current art institution after the institution had pre-established goals of community engagement. This indicates that, for the type of art institutions selected for this study, it was desirable to have a curator that not only had theoretical and art historical knowledge, but also first-hand experience with how artists reconcile their practice with social movements, community concerns and/or community educational goals. The curator without a background as an artist was able to exercise her creativity through funding

that supported her intentions to focus on engaging communities, despite her employment at a more traditional institution.

ii) Institutional Support

Collaborative networks via institutions and working relationships are very different for each of the curators in this study. The curator of the BMW Guggenheim Lab found a venue for curatorial participation outside of the Guggenheim Museum and invited public participation in their projects through this venue. The project is supported by the Guggenheim Museum, and programmed through her and her co-curator's vision and the work of their interdisciplinary team. Sergio Bessa's work is completely integrated into larger goals at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, though he moves fluidly between curatorial and education departments in order to facilitate community engagement priorities within curatorial projects. He has also invited projects from creative sources outside the museum, such as Bronx Stories and SMARTpower. Likewise, Betti-Sue Hertz's curation is completely integrated into the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts overarching goals. She does not focus on participatory events and activities that the YBCA is involved with. However, she communicates regularly with the community outreach department in order to make sure that they are able to have access to the best discourses on exhibition material, and thus create broadly accessible art experiences that accompany her exhibit work. Rene de Guzman has found that the Oakland Standard provides a way to work from within, as well as separately from the Oakland Museum of California with a specific group organizing contemporary art events and community programs. The Oakland Standard allows freedom and mobility to create participatory experiences that act as invitations for communities to form long-term relationship with OMCA. While curators reported that they felt connected to institutional

or project goals of engaging communities, they also reported their desire for curators to be perceived by colleagues and communities as integral to these institutional and field-wide goals.

iii) Funding

Funding opportunities have enabled curators in this study to pursue strategies for engaging communities in art museums. A grant from BMW allowed curators to lead the Guggenheim Lab project. Institutional support enabled Sergio Bessa to use the museums depleted funds for museum positions as an opportunity to enhance collaboration by further integrating curatorial and education department. Betti-Sue Hertz is financially supported to address broad audiences and social justice concerns through her exhibitions and communicate closely with community outreach programs. Rene de Guzman and others at the Oakland Standard have been supported through a grant from the Irvine Foundation and the Oakland Museum of California encourages institution-wide concern for engaging communities. External funding and institutional funding support of curatorial innovation and programming have greatly influenced the mobility of curators at each of these four art museums to integrate community engagement activities into their practice.

Curator participant interviews also indicate that limited funding or institutional support does not determine the suppression of curatorial innovation. Rather, limited institutional support and/or funding can heighten curatorial interest in creating models that transcend traditional practices. For example, Sergio Bessa lacked funding for the curatorial department but had institutional support to use the funds that were available to create a close relationship between education and curation departments and curators at the Guggenheim Lab created their own supportive team of advisors for the Lab despite an initial lack of funds for their ideas within their

institution. However, every curator reported that they had either institutional or funding support or both backing their practice.

Questions Raised by the Research for Art Curators

1. Art curators in this study consider community engagement practices to be very compatible and connected to traditional art curatorial practices. How can traditional curatorial roles in all art institutions be instrumental in community engagement rather than contradictory?

Artwork and exhibitions are still the central communicative medium of art curators in this study. Additional activities correspond with ‘care’ for making art museums accessible to communities across lines of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender. Emerging art curatorial practices described by this study indicate the shifting of the paradigm of intellectual instructing “public” discourse. Instead, communities are guiding curatorial responses and challenging them to react spontaneously to community experiences, arts and cultural interests and social movements.

2. Inviting community voices to influence the development of interpretive content and programs in art museums is an emergent practice identified by this research, which creates direct curator accountability to communities and direct community engagement in the production of central art museum resources. How is the curator’s traditional role uniquely linked to these engagement practices and how can it strengthen overall community access to art institutions?

Some curators interviewed in this study are already experimenting with bottom-up participatory planning practices, whether through their institution or through grant supported projects. Art curators, the art scholars and interpretation specialists, are distinctly connected to

early and essential stages of deciding what art exhibitions are offered to communities in museums. Therefore, they are important gatekeepers to the possibilities of making exhibition planning and development practices accessible to representative local communities. Curators who are already experimenting with inviting community representatives to be participants in the exhibition and program planning process report that their goals are to empower communities through this process and elevate the creativity and experiences of local communities. Some curators report that community members are consulted for their expertise and act as informed collaborators in creating programs and exhibitions that are more responsive to community needs. These experimental practices offer art curators a level of accountability unmatched by other forms of community participation.

3. Emerging curatorial community engagement practices are still in experimental and inconsistent stages even in supportive institutions. If direct community engagement in developing art exhibitions and programs practice is vital to a socially just relationship with underrepresented and oppressed communities, what existing models can help art curators implement emerging community engagement practices in a variety of institutions?

Direct community access to art interpretive content and exhibitions is still an experimental, emerging trend in curatorial practice and used inconsistently even among art curators in museums that say they exemplify priorities of community engagement and social justice concerns. This emergent practice among some curator participants indicates that they consider art museum responses to communities more nimble when they create direct and interactive ways to engage communities through art exhibition and program development. Because of the direct access that this practice affords communities, models of this emergent

practice should be developed to emphasize the importance of representative collaborative art interpretation and exhibition teams so that curator led interactions with communities counter oppressive social patterns that impact the experiences of many groups. A participatory planning model already used in museums is the Community Museum Model (Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, 2006.) The Social Equity Analysis toolkit (Applied Research Center, 2010) is another adaptable model already used in varying ways by a variety of public institutions. By using or combining models such as these, community concerns and needs can be pre-emptively addressed and community investment in art exhibitions would be created from the bottom-up. Appropriate and nimble responses to the issues curator participants report interest in are most directly measured through discussions with community representatives themselves. Through this emergent practice and others curator participants continue to extend their arts care-taking into the public realm.

Questions Raised by the Research for Art Museums and Centers

1. Data collected from curator responses suggests art curators must sometimes seek external funding if art museums and centers cannot support curator led community engagement funding. Why might external funding opportunities for art curator-led community engagement practices be vital to the overall growth of these practices in the field?

Some art curator participants reported that funding opportunities specifically in the area of curator-led community engagement projects have been invaluable to them for two reasons. 1) If an institution does not prioritize community engagement then you are not given sufficient incentive or opportunities to expand skills and knowledge in this area. 2) It is also hard to expand

skills and activities even if employed at a supportive institution if there are monetary or resource restraints or curator ideas go beyond the scope of institutional engagement practices.

2. Because funding for institutions in the category of social justice is low already, curators will be particularly marginalized from opportunities to expand their community engagement practices, based on the dominant association of community engagement with other museum departments. Why might the lack of larger support networks for curator involvement in community engagement be detrimental to change in the entire field?

Recent studies tell us that, “Only 10 percent of grant dollars made with a primary or secondary purpose of supporting the arts explicitly benefit underserved communities, including lower-income populations, communities of color and other disadvantaged groups. And less than 4 percent focus on advancing social justice goals.” (Holly Sidford, 2010, p.1) That suggests that a fraction of that amount lower than the amount used by education or engagement, those departments considered more directly associated with community relationships and engagement, has been focused on art curator-led projects emphasizing community access to art museums. One curator recalled that funding for curator positions was scarce during the worst years of the recession and more funding was available for education. This led to creative, curator collaboration and community engagement, but also a reduced curation staff that they are now building back up. While a decrease in funding does not necessarily exclude curator community engagement, it does limit its mobility and freedom.

3. If art curators become empowered with institutional support, external funding support, and support networks for implementing models of community access to art museums will the whole field benefit from their unique contributions in this area?

As the central caretaker of artworks/collections and the exhibition process, curators are essential professionals in the art museum institution. As the gatekeepers of art museum exhibition planning they cannot be separated from overall institutional goals of community engagement and socially just inclusion strategies. If their positions are in danger of being defunded or they are not understood as innovators in community engagement strategies than field-wide change is unobtainable.

Limitations to the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

An important limitation to this study design is that it focuses on the perspective of the curator rather than local perceptions of the value of the curator's contributions to the community. This value could be measured by evaluating responses from community leaders who have collaborated on curatorial projects and artist communities that have likewise collaborated with the curator. A study focusing on community feedback would provide useful qualitative measurements of curatorial success as a public ambassador for their art museum and as someone hoping to engage communities in ways useful and valuable to them.

It is a challenge to find a reliable methodology with which to identify curators who work to expand community access to art museums. This challenge arises from the fact that there is a relatively small number of art museums that have explicit public mention of institution-wide interest in issues of diverse community engagement and/or social justice. To complicate matters, art institutions that present themselves as engaged in these issues may 1) be motivated primarily by current trends and funding opportunities rather than institutional will or 2) employ curators that are not engaged in the ideological agenda of the institution.

The methods for this study hypothesized that, by looking at institutions that presented a supportive culture for diverse community engagement and social justice issues, curatorial strategies that encouraged community access would also be present. Further research should be conducted with a greater number of case studies to understand how art curators innovate and create access to art and art museums with and without institutional support. This kind of study would allow for more findings on curatorial practices that function as engines for access and equity within museums that have not yet displayed an institutional will to pursue diverse community engagement and social justice. A study could address this gap in the research by distributing a national survey to art curators in order to select those who perceive themselves as expanding community access with and without institutional will.

Additionally, this study suggests that curator-led, grant funded projects allow curators to expand their role and collaboration practices outside museum bureaucracy. Curators in this study expressed that grant supported projects provided valuable freedom to respond quickly to community voices, innovate and focus on participation and engagement, however a larger sample size is needed to make conclusive statements about these situations. Another study could explore the effects of current grant opportunities on curatorial innovation and community engagement strategies and indicate trends in art curatorial practices given mobility through additional funding.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Public programming, community outreach, visitor studies and education departments have been central to discussions in the art museum field about strategies for community engagement. However, little documentation is available of the ways in which art curators today see their practice as actively participating in and even generating creative strategies to propel museums toward new levels of inclusion. The goal of this research has been to identify and describe emerging trends in practice among art curators who work to expand community access to art museums.

Curators were selected for this study based on their employment at art institutions with commitment to 1) community engagement and/or 2) social justice as demonstrated through their online identity. At selected institutions, the BMW Guggenheim Lab, The Bronx Museum of Arts, The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, and the Oakland Museum of California, curators were asked to participate in on-site semi-structured interviews. Key words and concepts were cross-referenced between all interviews to find similar themes in order to describe the range of emerging practices that can be found in a diverse set of exemplary art institutions.

Findings indicate that curators interviewed for this study have not abandoned more traditional curatorial roles of organizing art exhibitions and interpreting collections through specialized skill and expertise, but instead added to them. Additional roles correspond with expanding the scope of exhibitions and programs in order to engage communities considered non-traditional art museum audiences. Curator participants respond to issues that shape communities and consider how art museum spaces can be programmed and changed in order to promote comfort, familiarity and elevate community expertise and creativity. All curators in this

study are shifting the paradigm of curator/intellectual instructing public conversation to diverse communities guiding curatorial work.

Art curator participant responses suggest that traditional curatorial roles can be perceived and practiced as complimentary rather than contradictory to community engagement. However, in order for curator-led community engagement to expand sustainably, the museum field must support the development of emergent curatorial practices. Acknowledging and fostering the connection between curatorial care of artwork and curatorial care for the experiences of communities inside and outside the art museum can be central to goals to achieve more public and inclusive art museums.

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Appendix A

1. The Bronx Museum of the Arts

Mission: The Bronx Museum of the Arts is a contemporary art museum that connects diverse audiences to the urban experience through its permanent collection, special exhibitions, and education programs. Reflecting the borough's dynamic communities, the Museum is the crossroad where artists, local residents, national and international visitors meet.

About: The flagship cultural institution of the Bronx, founded in 1971, The Bronx Museum of the Arts focuses on 20th-century and contemporary art, while serving the culturally diverse populations of the Bronx and the greater New York metropolitan area. The museum's home on the Grand Concourse is a distinctive contemporary landmark designed by the internationally renowned firm Arquitectonica.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts maintains a permanent collection of 20th and 21st-century works by artists of African, Asian, and Latin American ancestry. Additionally, the Museum collects works by artists for whom the Bronx has been critical to their artistic practice and development. The Museum's educational offerings spring from these central programs with outreach to children and families as well as adult audiences.

2. BMW Guggenheim Lab Space

Part urban think tank, part community center and public gathering space, the Lab is conceived to inspire public discourse in cities around the world and through the BMW Guggenheim Lab website and online social communities.

About: The BMW Guggenheim Lab is a mobile laboratory traveling to nine major cities worldwide over six years. Led by international, interdisciplinary teams of emerging talents in the areas of urbanism, architecture, art, design, science, technology, education, and sustainability, the Lab addresses issues of contemporary urban life through programs and public discourse. Its goal is the exploration of new ideas, experimentation, and ultimately the creation of forward-thinking solutions for city life.

The theme of the Lab's first two-year cycle is *Confronting Comfort*—exploring notions of individual and collective comfort and the urgent need for environmental and social responsibility.

3. Yerba Buena Center for the Art

Mission: YBCA is an integrated site of creative endeavor; a unique fusion of art, innovation and ideas in a social environment. It serves as a curated platform for the dynamic convergence of artists, inventors, producers, thinkers, and community to sustain multiple levels of participation, propel short and long term social change, and insure that live arts and living artists are vital to society.

Core Values: Diversity and Inclusion; We completely embrace the challenge of working with people from different backgrounds, with different life experiences and alternative points of view. Underlying our commitment to diversity is mutual trust, respect and an openness to other perspectives, even if it makes us uncomfortable at the moment; & Collaboration and Cooperation; Collaboration and Cooperation; We are committed to the collaborative process of creation. Through the complex and rewarding experience of working together, we strive to create what would not have been possible by acting alone.

One of YBCA's 4 "Big Ideas": ENCOUNTER: Engaging the social context, Contemporary artists that come to YBCA are very often deeply engaged with the social context. They are interested in exposing and challenging some of the inequities that exist in the contemporary world and making us think more deeply about issues of social justice, creating change and striving for a better world. Often, they want to provoke us to some sort of change in behavior or action. But their work almost always involves a confrontation, or an encounter, with reality and even truth.

4. Oakland Museum of California (OMCA)

Mission: The mission of the Oakland Museum of California is to connect communities to the cultural and environmental heritage of California. Through collections, exhibitions, education programs, and public dialogue, we inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to think creatively and critically about the natural, artistic and social forces that characterize our state and influence its relationship to the world.

Advisory Committees: "The Museum's advisory councils work with our Education Department and support us in our mission to stay connected to the Bay Area's many diverse communities. The members of the African American Advisory Council, Asian Pacific Advisory Council, Latino Advisory Council, and Native American Advisory Council provide counsel regarding museum-wide initiatives—such as our renovation and expansion project, temporary exhibitions, and educational programs—that reflect community needs and cultural interests."

The Oakland Standard: Is a series of contemporary art projects produced by the Oakland Museum of California. Ranging from experimental exhibitions to blogs, from workshops to meals, the projects explore innovative ways to engage audiences. Oakland Standard programs nurture inquisitiveness, and support the creativity of artists and the public.

Appendix B

Final Interview Instrument

Introduction

Hello and thank you again for meeting with me today!

I selected you to interview because your museum states ... about its identity and I was curious about your role here at the museum.

Introductory and Practice Based Questions

Could we start with your background?

Could you tell me about your professional background and how you came to work at the (museum)?

How does this inform your practice today?

What sorts of roles do you play at the museum? For example: what departments do you work with the most? Do you curate art or art and education programs?

Can you expand on some of the projects you have recently completed or are working on?

What artists do you think most advance the mission and values of your museum?

Values and Philosophy Questions

Based on what you have just told me about the values at your museum right now, how does your own work connect with these ideas and goals?

How does your curatorial practice invite the participation of diverse local communities? (Do you work with artists who do this themselves and facilitate their efforts? Do you collaborate with education and outreach on these issues? Is this something you do yourself through creating partnerships with trusted community organizations or leaders?)

What is your sense of the role curators can play in art museums today?

Would you mind sharing with me a little of your own philosophy on how art and art museums can be essential to everyday life in this city and to a variety of communities?

Closing Questions and Thanks

Thank you so much for answering all these questions! Do you have any other comments you would like to share?

Thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate it. Please let me know if you have any other questions about the research and I'll update you with the progress of the project.