BOOK REVIEW

From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education in the 21st Century

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This anthology constitutes a major contribution to the art museum education profession, and its chapters are certain to appear in reference lists alongside the work of other authors and editors most frequently cited in the literature, including John Falk and Lynn Dierking, George Hein, and Eileen Hooper-Greenhill. Although art museum educators are primary beneficiaries, the contents of this book are in many ways applicable to every division of the National Art Education Association, from K-12 teachers and administrators to university professors. The only other book focusing on museum education published by the National Art Education Association (NAEA) was released 20 years ago: Nancy Berry and Susan Mayer's edited anthology, Museum Education: History, Theory, and Practice (1989) which no longer appears on the available publications list of NAEA. Although a comparison of the two books reveals similarities in the concerns, theory, and practice of art museum education, Villeneuve’s anthology reveals that much has changed pertaining to the role, status, and value of educators within art museums, the range of resources and opportunities available for teaching, and our understanding of how a vastly diverse visitor population learns and experiences museums.

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Pat Villeneuve is well qualified to serve as editor of this book, with 25 years of professional art museum education work behind her and significant experience as researcher, author, and editor. Currently she serves as arts administration and art museum education faculty and coordinator of graduate studies in the Department of Art Education at Florida State University. Villeneuve approached editorship of this volume with the same vigorous, substantive, and imaginative flair she demonstrated as editor of the journal Art Education from 2001 to 2003. Each chapter is concise, descriptive, and well organized with useful headings, and the intentions of the authors are clearly stated. Keenly aware of the need for theory-to-practice resources in the field, Villeneuve encouraged authors to include concrete examples of the application of ideas and proposals, as well as realistic advice to practitioners. Thankfully, no whining was allowed; although museum educators certainly have their share of woes and frustrations, the authors take the constructive high road and emphasize what works and how the field can improve from within despite obstructions from the larger museum culture. The level of scholarship across chapters is high and a substantial amount of recent research is reported, yet to Villeneuve's credit, her policy seems to have been to avoid jargon or ponderous syntax that would obscure meaning, hinder timely application of useful ideas, or discourage broad readership. Yet the text is far from being oversimplified; this book is very appropriate for graduate students and professionals.

Villeneuve likes to encourage new, alternative, and contrasting ideas and approaches to museum education. Toward that end, she devised the "Many Voices Project." Unedited manuscripts were placed on a dedicated website and then art museum educators and related professionals were invited to read and offer comments. Selections, a few of them extensive, appear in highlighted boxes within their corresponding chapters. Some expand or deepen the topic at hand or provide thought-provoking insights or questions, others inject real-world perspectives. Their inclusion in the text contributes to the dialogic environment Villeneuve hopes to stimulate, which in the long run may be the most valuable outcome of this book's publication. There is no hint of pretense that this book is comprehensive or the last word on art museum education; rather, it continues and propels vital aspects of a larger conversation begun in American art museums 100 years ago. If the conversation ends, it will signal the demise of progressive, innovative museum education.

Villeneuve sets the tone of the book with the Preface, which consists of an actual conversation among five seasoned, recognized leaders in art museum education. Unless these individuals are superhumanly articulate, the transcription has been edited for flow to make it easier to follow and more quotable. Between them, the conversationalists manage to introduce many, if not most, of the topics and issues addressed in the 29 chapters that follow. The Preface might be eye-opening for novices to museum education. Sure, it's great to be able to teach with genuine works of art, but in reality, art museum educators may go for days without setting foot in a gallery. They are often buried in research, stressed by deadlines, balancing budgets, building curriculums, preparing workshops, training interns, and rubbing their weary eyes and aching backs from hours spent working at computers. And yet, even art museums suffer from internal politics and bureaucracy, complete with obstacles to hurdle, alliances to forge, and forced-marches from
seemingly pointless morning meetings to seemingly endless afternoon meetings. Nevertheless, these educators are neither discouraging nor intimidating in their observations. For instance, although Kim Kanatani of the Guggenheim Museum is less than sanguine when she refers to museum educators becoming disillusioned or burning out, ultimately, she stresses the progress on many fronts that art museum educators have made, including the positive impact of education on museum culture, improved public perception of art museums, increased level of cooperation between educators and curators, multiplication of resources and forums for museum educators' professional development, and the collective strengths and collaborative character of a diversified membership of museum educators that "fosters a wonderful multifaceted synergy that really empowers and fuels our profession" (p. 6).

Readers may wish to skip from the Preface to Chapter Seven by Y-Chien Chen Cooper before returning to Chapter One. Cooper empirically studied the qualifications and responsibilities of art museum educators.

Villeneuve limits her own editorial comments to a one-page introduction and half-page afterward, preferring to let the thematic structure of the book guide readers' thoughts and allow the authors to speak for themselves. The chapters are grouped into six parts which, taken together, address museum history, research, evaluation, theoretical foundations, visitor characteristics, school and community collaborations, day-to-day practice, and possible new directions. In this review there is room to mention only a few chapters.

In the opening chapter, Melanie Buffington eschewed a chronological approach to history in favor of a thematic approach, which is preferable when the aim is to identify and discuss ideas and issues that still have currency. Six themes are described, among them the relationship of art museums to artists, public education, and the concept of cultured citizenry. The section addressing emerging technologies may hold surprises for readers who have not been keeping up. Blogs, interactive websites, online virtual tours, downloadable gallery guides, cell phone-accessible audio tours, visitor-created electronic tours, and podcasts are already part of today's museums. No one is more aware than Buffington that within a short time the "emerging technologies" she describes will be eclipsed, but the impact of technology is here to stay.

The chapter by David Ebiz explains the nature and importance of theory and presents his "transacting theory" which stands in contrast to other paradigms, offering a dynamic and promising new approach to thinking about how and why museums work, or should work. The chapter immediately following, by Jessica J. Luke and Marianna Adams, is perfectly placed. Luke and Adams assemble and analyze a broad survey of existing research pertaining to learning in art museums, noting that "most studies lacked a clearly articulated theoretical framework, requiring us to infer underlying conceptual assumptions" (p. 33). A summative table conveniently identifies the methods and foci of researchers. The authors discuss both what is known and not known, and look ahead to how these studies might inform the next decade of research and practice.

Rebecca McGinnis authored a splendid chapter titled, "Enabling Education: Including People with Disabilities in Art Museum Programming." This chapter provides an enormous amount of thought-provoking, enlightening, useful, and genuinely inspiring opinions, information, and advice. McGinnis adheres to a "social model of disability, in which the environment—rather than the individual—is the disabling force" (p.141). She persuasively makes the case that "people with disabilities do not deviate from the 'norm' but are instead just part of the rich diversity of humanity" (p.141). Universal Design, then, is not so much a solution to special problems as it is a natural component in fulfillment of a museum's mission to serve the public. McGinnis provides many examples of museums offering welcoming,
inclusive environments. Everyone would benefit if this chapter were to become required reading not just for museum educators but for everybody working in museums, including—and perhaps especially—executive directors and governing boards.

One of the most compelling chapters is Dana Carlisle Ketchka's fascinating social analysis of the status and role of women in the evolution and current state of museum education. Some of her accounts of gender discrimination are jaw-dropping. Ketchka illuminates circumstances that have been concealed behind a veil of dominant social and cultural biases, and offers suggestions for advancing reform. Catherine Arias and Denise A. Gray take a more rubber-meets-the-road approach to their chapter about museum education for adolescents, and supply a wealth of useful material for those planning and implementing programs. Pat Villeneuve and Ann Rowson Love deliver a field-tested model for inquiry and interpretation of artworks that could be useful to teachers, professors, and museum educators alike. One positive attribute of their model is that it is at once comprehensive and flexible, and it is readily adaptable to a variety of educational goals and contexts without compromising the primary quest for meaning.

Randi Korn, the only author to have chapters in both the 1989 and current anthologies, provides a succinct outline of the fundamental types and applications of evaluation in museums. Korn persuasively argues that evaluation can and should be a key element in the investigation of, and planning for, optimal learning experiences in museums. Research initiated by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is described in the chapter by Susan Longhenry. It is always interesting when researchers sample segments of the population that do not visit museums as well as those who do. Today's museums strive to serve as broad a cross-section of the community as possible, and are serious about stimulating repeat visits and enticing under-represented populations. Research can provide valuable insights into visitors' and potential visitors' motivations and preferences regarding personal learning and the use of leisure time. It is refreshing that Longhenry includes in her commentary a rare consideration of the spiritual dimension of visitor experiences. Educators can get so caught up in cognitive development that they overlook visitors' desires to connect with the ineffable in and through art.

A book that was published the same year as Villeneuve's anthology is In Principle, In Practice: Museums as Learning Institutions, edited by John Falk, Lynn Dierking, and Susan Foutz. Many of the same concerns are explored but in a more generic, global way or else from the perspectives of other types of museums such as science centers, aquariums, and children's museums. For those who wish to read more broadly about learning in museums other than art museums this would be an excellent companion book.

**REFERENCES**
