

The International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management,
Denver American Indian Commission, and
Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs
Roundtable

Reclaiming our Spaces: Visualizing and Realizing Diversity in the Museum of the Future
October 8, 2018

Hosted by: History Colorado Center
1200 North Broadway
Denver, Colorado 80203



International Institute
for Indigenous
Resource Management



Denver American Indian
Commission



Colorado Commission of
Indian Affairs



History Colorado

BACKGROUND AND AGENDA

BACKGROUND

The lack of diversity among museum professionals and museum-goers has been recognized by international organizations, museum associations, and museum professional organizations as a long-standing issue that requires fixing. Following is a sample of the organizational and association policies and strategies designed to fix the diversity problem.

International Organizations. As early as 1960, UNESCO adopted the *Recommendation Concerning the Most Effective Means of Rendering Museums Accessible to Everyone*, the first universal instrument dedicated to preserving and managing museums, recognizing their essential role in education and sharing the cultural diversity of the world. The adoption, in November 2015, of the *Recommendation Concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society* by UNESCO represented a new, decisive step towards developing and implementing an innovative and open vision of museums in the twenty-first century. Included among the 2015 UNESCO recommendations are the following:

- Member States are encouraged to support the social role of museums. Museums are increasingly viewed in all countries as playing a key role in society and as a factor in social integration and cohesion. In this sense, they can help communities to face profound changes in society, including those leading to a rise in inequality and the breakdown of social ties.
- Museums are vital public spaces that should address all of society and can therefore play an important role in the development of social ties and cohesion, building citizenship, and reflecting on collective identities. Museums should be places that are open to all and committed to physical and cultural access to all, including disadvantaged groups. They can constitute spaces for reflection and debate on historical, social, cultural and scientific issues. Museums should also

foster respect for human rights and gender equality. Member States should encourage museums to fulfil all of these roles.

- In instances where the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples is represented in museum collections, Member States should take appropriate measures to encourage and facilitate dialogue and the building of constructive relationships between those museums and indigenous peoples concerning the management of those collections, and, where appropriate, return or restitution in accordance with applicable laws and policies.

Museum Associations. Since 1906, the American Alliance of Museums has been helping its members develop standards and best practices, gathering and sharing knowledge, and providing advocacy on issues of concern to the entire museum community. The Alliance's Diversity and Inclusion Policy states:

"The American Alliance of Museums respects, values and celebrates the unique attributes, characteristics and perspectives that make each person who they are. We believe that our strength lies in our diversity among the broad range of people and museums we represent. We consider diversity and inclusion a driver of institutional excellence and seek out diversity of participation, thought and action. It is our aim, therefore, that our members, partners, key stakeholders reflect and embrace these core values."

Museum Professional Organizations. In 2016, the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC) & AAMC Foundation announced the formation of a Diversity Task Force, a key outcome of the organization's 2015 Strategic Planning process. Christa Clarke, Senior Curator, Arts of Global Africa, Newark Museum, and AAMC & AAMC Foundation Vice President of Programs and Diversity Task Force co-leader said, "Our Task Force is dedicated to building inclusion into our profession, establishing concrete processes and resources to increase opportunities while fostering open discussion of entrenched systems of disenfranchisement with our organizations. We will work toward making an impact through both action and dialogue." As an important first step, the Board of Trustees for the organizations approved the Diversity Task Force's policy, which is being applied to every aspect of their activities:

"All of AAMC & AAMC Foundation programming and overall efforts shall strive to be representative of diversity: across self-identifications (by nation, gender, creed, race), fields of expertise, types of institutional mission, and regional position, of participants. The more diverse our voices, the more dynamic our offerings."

The Persistence of the Diversity Problem. Notwithstanding the promulgation of diversity and inclusion policies by international organizations, museum associations, and museum professional organizations the diversity problem persists. For example, the Mellon Foundation's *Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey*, which studied the gender and ethnic diversity of AAMD member museums, found that twenty-eight percent (28%) of museum staffs are from minority backgrounds. The great majority of these workers are concentrated in security, facilities, finance, and human resources jobs. Among museum curators, conservators, educators and leaders, only four percent (4%) are African American and three percent (3%) Hispanic.

Similarly, more than seventy percent (70%) of the board members of *Fortune* 500 companies are white and male, according to a 2013 study by the Alliance for Board Diversity. This is a small change from the approximately seventy-five percent (75%) of Caucasian male board members that a 2010 version of the study revealed. The report also found that women and minorities are underrepresented in board leadership positions.

But exactly whose problem is diversity? More accurately, the question is: who else has a diversity problem? The American Alliance of Museums, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Diversity and Inclusion Framework hints at the answer to this question in the policy's discussion of "Key Stakeholders":

"Individuals, organizations and corporations of all types have the potential to offer insight and expertise on a broad range of strategies related to diversity and inclusion initiatives. We are committed to working collaboratively with key stakeholders locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally to strengthen the integrity, impact and relevance of museums."

Arguably, the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in relevant parts, identifies indigenous peoples as owners of at least one-half of the diversity problem.

For example, Article 11.1 states: "Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature."

And Article 31.1 provides: "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions."

UNDRIP sets out the obligations of States and the rights of indigenous peoples. However, it is silent on the obligations of indigenous peoples. But for the purposes of this roundtable, where UNDRIP's silence speaks loudest is in the absence of any requirement that the cultural heritage is possessed by, or located within the ambit of control of, indigenous peoples.

The purpose of the Roundtable Reclaiming our Spaces: Visualizing and Realizing Diversity in the Museum of the Future.

The challenges to tribal ownership of the other half of the diversity problem is: first, in acknowledging that diversity is indeed our problem; second, in acknowledging our concomitant obligations to reify the rights set forth by UNDRIP; and third, in working with museums to come up with the strategies and programs to fix **OUR** museum diversity problem.

The Roundtable will bring together museum professionals, educators, tribal, state, and local government officials, artists, attorneys, and others to identify the challenges to, and opportunities for, fixing **OUR** museum diversity problem.

AGENDA

08:30 Registration and coffee.

09:00 Introductions.

09:20 First Discussion: What is a museum?

MUSEUMS ARE MANY THINGS TO MANY DIFFERENT PUBLICS. They are places of memory. They are architectural marvels and sometimes architectural monstrosities. They are monuments to civic pride and the egos of city “fathers” and benefactors. They are tourist attractions and recreation centers. They are drivers of city revitalization, urban economic development, and just as often gentrification and ethnic removal. Other definitions include:

“ESTABLISHED IN 1879, HISTORY COLORADO IS A 501(c)(3) CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION AND AN AGENCY OF THE STATE OF COLORADO under the Department of Higher Education. The museum offers access to cultural and heritage resources including statewide Community Museums, programs for families and adults, stewardship of Colorado’s historic treasures, and resources for students and teachers. It provides programs and services related to historic preservation and archaeology as well as access to a vast collection of archives, artifacts, and historical photography.”
<https://www.historycolorado.org/about>

“A MUSEUM IS A NON-PROFIT, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.” *International Council of Museums Statutes adopted by the 22nd General Assembly in Vienna, Austria, August 24th, 2007.*

“MUSEUMS CAN BE VERY PAINFUL SITES for Native peoples, as they are intimately tied to the colonization process.” *Amy Lonetree, Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012.*

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, leaders of major museums thought the size of their collections mattered more than the ability of visitors to actually see them. As a result, these institutions became behemoths; in possession of so much “stuff” they could not hope to put even a fraction of their holdings on display. Under these circumstances, museum acquisitions turned into an elite form of hoarding. *William Newton, Big Museums Need To Stop Hoarding Treasures Nobody Ever Sees, The Federalist, <http://thefederalist.com/2016/08/01/big-museums-need-to-stop-hoarding-treasures-nobody-ever-sees/>, August 1, 2016.*

FIRST DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What else is a museum? What do objects and the museum space which they occupy signify to the diverse publics who come in contact with these objects or enter into these spaces?

Can a museum be virtual? Based on tribal political, cultural, legal, economic, social, and other interests what's good, bad, or indifferent about virtual museums?

10:40 Second Discussion: Why it's not our museum?

ART MUSEUMS often occupy highly contested urban space. Following the successes of art museums like the Guggenheim Bilbao, economic development literature has conceptualized art museums as beneficial anchor institutions that stabilize neighborhoods economically and socially, and catalysts that attract new development. However, an art museum's ability to attract new development and its connection to more privileged groups likely implicate it in the negative processes of gentrification, which include displacement, socio-cultural isolation of, and/or higher housing costs for residents. *Justin Meyer, Art Museums and Their Connection to Neighborhood Change: A Case Study of the Portland Art Museum in Oregon, PhD Diss., Urban and Regional Planning) University of Michigan, 2016.*

MUSEUM SPACES are more than just containers for exhibition settings and objects on display. Layout, design and atmosphere are some of the most significant factors in the overall experience of a museum visit. Spatial design, in museums and elsewhere, is a communicative element that gives a space's contents additional meaning. . . . All of the elements of an exhibition, including the exhibition space, are interdependent and the relationships between them are what generate the concept of museum displays with their characteristic multimodality and three-dimensionality. *Märil Simonsson, Displaying Spaces Spatial Design, Experience, and Authenticity in Museums, PhD diss., Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University, 2014.*

DEDICATED TO COLONIAL economic and Enlightenment intellectual enquiry, the collection and display of Māori material culture was an integral part of [Te Papa's] activities. Initially, this was considered a salvage operation that would preserve the material remains of an inevitably "dying race." Collectors extracted Māori *taonga* (cultural treasures) from the "tribal affiliations and genealogical histories that animates them" (McCarthy 2011, 177). The provenance and the circumstances of their production were seldom recorded by collectors and museum staff. Within the context of the museum, these *taonga* became "tribal relics" and "curios" that were arranged and displayed according to essentializing ethnological principles. *Kirstie Ross, Slice of Heaven: 20th Century Aotearoa: Biculturalism and Social History at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa; in Aboriginal Policy Studies, Vol 2, no. 2, 2013, pp. 115-127.*

IT LATER TRANSPIRED that Richard's conversation about black people not going to galleries was in part a response to his own feelings of anxiety within the gallery space. Richard, as well as a few of the other participant parents, had developed personal strategies for avoiding painful situations and settings in which they felt inferior or out of place. In effect they were using strategies of self-policing and elimination with regard to places of "high" culture, deploying their own versions of subculture as a rationale for their own exclusion. *David Osa Amadasun, Black people don't go to galleries, Museums Association, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/comment/30102013-black-people-dont-go-to-galleries>, 2013.*

SECOND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What do you know about the museums in Denver or elsewhere? Have you visited any museums in Denver or elsewhere? What was the purpose of your visit(s)? For you and your family, what are museums?

12:30 Lunch and planned screening of Lived History—The Story of the Wind River Virtual Museum (pending filmmaker approval).

Over the years, pipes, cradle boards, parfleches, and other ancestral artifacts from the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming have accumulated in museums, far from their place of origin. “Lived History” documents the creation of a high definition video “virtual museum” of ancestral artifacts, currently stored in museum collections, for the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes.

1:50 Third Discussion: Making museums our spaces—opportunities and challenges.

IN 2016 THE NEWARK MUSEUM relocated its Native American collection from a tuck-away space to a central gallery on the ground floor, at the intersection of the Decorative Arts, Asian Art, and American Art galleries, steering our visitors toward the new conversations we want to have about the Museum’s global collections. Titled “Native Artists of North America,” this long-term installation presents a selection of rarely exhibited historical objects, which have been taken from storage, studied, treated, and reinterpreted. They are arranged with ample space and light, allowing visitors to get up close to the materials, and reflect the experience of six different curators, including five leading indigenous artists and scholars from around the country. “Native Artists” becomes, in effect, the way into *Seeing America*, Newark’s recently reconceived display of American art, featuring Indigenous art—historical, modern, and contemporary—installed through the chronological narrative. *Decolonizing the Museum, Part Two, Newark Museum, 2017.*

ACCESS TO MUSEUMS can be difficult for some people because of the expense of travel. The Internet computer “network of networks” provides a low-cost and instantaneous means of transmitting museums information to people over great distances using the extremely popular World Wide Web global hypermedia system. However, a significant difficulty with the Internet is finding information of interest. Automated “search engines” can provide search facilities using keywords, but this can be a somewhat hit and miss affair in practice, requiring significant selection skill on the part of the user. On-line directories, maintained by experts, are one way that information in a particular domain, such as museums, can be presented in a well thought out manner. *Jonathan P. Bowen, University of Reading, Department of Computer Science, Virtual Visits to Virtual Museums, 1998.*

OLA I NĀ MO’OLELO RECOGNIZES WHAT CHEROKEE WRITER THOMAS KING CALLS “THE TRUTH ABOUT STORIES,” how the mo’olelo that surround us shape our perceptions, our values, and our beliefs about ourselves, others, and our world. We become those mo’olelo. We must therefore be sure that the mo’olelo that surround us, the mo’olelo we tell, the mo’olelo that circulate within our communities, the mo’olelo that live are not other people’s mo’olelo of who we are, but mo’olelo that are connected to our kūpuna and our ‘āina—ones that empower and give us life. *Brandy Nālani McDougall, Finding Meaning: Kaona and Contemporary Hawaiian Literature, University of Arizona Press, 2016.*

THE DENVER AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION, the International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management, and the Denver Museum of Nature & Science have been collaborating in the planning and organization of a monthly screening of indigenous films as part of the Institute's Indigenous Film & Arts Festival for the past 7 years. Leadership of the organizations involved concluded their missions were compatible and mutually reinforcing, thus a partnership was logical. The monthly screenings at the Museum highlight some of the most positive aspects of indigenous arts, culture and tradition. The program offers the best examples of indigenous film, and provides a venue where the voice of indigenous people is not only heard, but celebrated. It is a place where members of Denver's Indian community can socialize with each other and interact with the broader community to share their personal experiences and add their observations to the stories presented on film. The program raises awareness of indigenous issues and, in so doing, shines a light on the social, economic, political and cultural concerns of American Indians in Denver. It provides a unique opportunity for cross-cultural discussion and exchange. *Jeanne M. Rubin, Festival Director, International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management, Indigenous Film as a Catalyst for Creating Community: A Case Study of the Partnership between the Denver American Indian Commission, International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management, and Denver Museum of Nature and Science, 16th Annual Hawai'i International Conference on Arts and Humanities, Honolulu, 2018.*

THIRD DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: How can museums value native knowledge? How do we make native knowledge integral to museum operations rather than an afterthought? How can we move beyond the consultant-model to one where native knowledge becomes integral to a museum's culture? Would more native staff members in leadership/curatorial positions encourage your attendance? How would the characterization of museum holdings from indigenous nations and societies as family members instead of artifacts affect your view of the nature of the relationship between museums and indigenous peoples? For example, what happens when we think of museums and indigenous peoples as having joint custody of our family members? What would encourage you to visit a museum? Free or reduced admission? More direct connection between you and the exhibits? For example, from February 23–June 10, 2018, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science exhibit, *Creatures of Light*, will feature bioluminescence and biofluorescence. Other past events included exhibits on chocolate and poisons. Would a short program with tribal elders explaining how bioluminescence and biofluorescence was featured in the ceremonies, songs, and stories of Indian tribes and other indigenous peoples make you more apt to visit the exhibit? Similar programs could have been developed for chocolate and poisons exhibits. Virtual reality technologies have been employed in the field of cultural heritage for at least a couple of decades. More applications and institutional acceptance are the result of advances in these technologies and the lower costs for their acquisition and for computing power. At present, much of the virtual reality and cultural heritage literature is focused almost exclusively on the technology. It seems to us there is a need to shift the virtual reality focus to emphasize: first, developing a network of native coders, game developers, and writers; connecting this network with tribal elders and other knowledge holders; and connecting this network with museums and other “repositories” of their tangible heritage. How can this be accomplished? Can we transform this network of native coders, game developers, and writers into a network of incipient curators, cultural heritage specialists, or other museum professionals? How?

4:00 Fourth Discussion: Next steps.

How do we get native students interested in museum careers? How can the Denver American Indian Commission, Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs, International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management, local colleges and universities, and local museums collaborate to build a curatorial pipeline for native students? Soft power lies in the ability to attract and persuade. Whereas hard power—the ability to coerce—grows out of a nation-state's military or economic might, soft power arises from the attractiveness of its culture, political ideals, and policies. What role can native filmmakers play in projecting soft power? How does the collaboration between and among the International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management, Denver American Indian Commission, and Denver Museum of Nature & Science advance their respective interests and the interests of Indian tribes and indigenous peoples' organizations? How can the Denver American Indian Commission, Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs, International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management, local colleges and universities, and local and European museums work with Indian tribes and First Nations to create fora to help them project soft power? What is needed to link tribal projection of soft power with repatriation, co-management, loans, joint exhibits, and other collaborative efforts? What follow-up research, workshops, or roundtables are needed to develop and implement strategies consistent with the functions of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/restitution-of-cultural-property/>) to make this linkage?

5:00 Roundtable ends.