

11-2011

Collections Management at the New Orleans Museum of Art

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Collections Management at the New Orleans Museum of Art

An internship report submitted to the graduate faculty
of the University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Arts Administration

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November 2011

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Abstract

This internship report is the result of my time working with the registration and collections departments at the New Orleans Museum of Art. My work consisted of receiving, inventorying and moving objects in the collection, answering inquiries related to the collection, assisting with installations and breakdowns of exhibitions, and projects related to the collection files. Working from this vantage point, and with numerous other arts community working experience under my belt, I have compiled in this paper a discussion of the museum itself, the internship and my contributions to the organization, and an analysis of the organization and its overall contribution to the community as the largest arts organization in the city of New Orleans. This is my attempt to explain where NOMA is and where NOMA is going.

Chapter One: The Museum

Now celebrating its centennial year of operation, the New Orleans Museum of Art's mission is: "...to inspire the love of art; to collect, preserve, exhibit and present excellence in the visual arts; to educate, challenge and engage a diverse public."¹ The importance of the city art museum should not be understated when discussing a city's artistic community. A city art museum can be the anchor and the leader of a strong band of organizations, if the museum is both poised and prepared. In a city like New Orleans, where "love of art" is clear everywhere you turn, NOMA strives to create new and interesting opportunities for the arts community in the city of New Orleans. This goal is further explained by the museum's Vision Statement: "The guiding vision of the New Orleans Museum of Art is to advance its position as a premier national visual arts museum vital to the cultural and educational life of our city, state and region."²

History

The New Orleans Museum of Art is the city's largest arts institution, and has been a leader in the New Orleans arts community since its inception in 1910, when local businessman Isaac Delgado donated money to the City Park Improvements Association for the express purpose of building a museum in the park. First opening its doors to the public in 1911, The Isaac Delgado Museum of Art became The New Orleans Museum of Art in the mid-1970s when it was decided by the board of trustees that the museum would benefit from the name change. Notes from the trustee meetings of that era state that three major factors contributed to the decision:

...the name Delgado is not well known nationally or internationally, but that the name New Orleans is. It was also pointed out that there is constant confusion with Delgado College, and only a few people realize that Isaac Delgado provided no funds for operation and we receive no income from Delgado-Albania Plantation.³

Note that Delgado's gift made no investment toward the creation of an art collection or the operation of a museum, and the name change helped the museum remind donors that the museum would need their help to remain a vital institution. The true motivation behind Delgado's generous and lasting contribution to the city of New Orleans is unknown even to the museum's biographers. A letter from Isaac Delgado to City Park's board of commissioners states his intentions simply:

From an informal conversation held with my friend Mr. Lelong, and some members of your Executive Committee, I have been led to believe that you would willingly donate in the Park, the site for a building I propose erecting to be known as Isaac Delgado Museum of Art.

My desire is to give to the citizens of New Orleans a fire-proof building where works of art may be collected through gifts or loans, and where exhibits would be held from time to time, by the Art Association of New Orleans.⁴

As Prescott N. Dunbar, author of *The New Orleans Museum of Art: The First Seventy-Five Years*, notes in his dedication, this initial, seemingly serendipitous donation of the museum to the city is just one of a number of things through NOMA's history that are examples of "making the impossible a reality for this city."⁵ Isaac Delgado may have presented the necessary \$150,000 to construct and fire-proof the building, but he was no art collector. He owned no work to start off the collection, nor did he possess any connections to the arts community to begin building a system of donations. The initial build-up of the museum, as well as its continued success as a major arts organization, was due to the dedication of a variety of people that believed in the necessity of maintaining a large, important art museum in New Orleans.

The museum's initial board members were not only intent on creating a nationally credible art museum and maintaining regional pride, but also in pursuing a community-minded educational objective. Ellsworth Woodward, painter and original board member of the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, described the intent of the museum as "...a place where primary emphasis was on education,

moral uplift, and social betterment.”⁶ From the start, the intent was to provide to the city of New Orleans a place that could become its cultural heart, its center of creative inspiration. Isaac Delgado’s statement mentions “a fire-proof building where works of art can be collected...” This almost sweetly democratic and intentionally open-ended inception of a collection would be open to all areas of expertise and interest.

As in any story, however, intentions and reality do not always align. A city museum founded with the objective of building a community space wherein artistic objects can be displayed for the good of the entire population is beholden to the populace that it intends to serve, in one way or another. As with any art museum that relies on gifts from many donors rather than the personal collection of a single individual, NOMA’s collection can only grow so far as the donations of its benefactors will allow. Isaac Delgado was not a collector, nor did he offer any base for the start of a collection. He simply provided the building collateral, and relied on the people of the city to fill it with their own forms of artistic generosity.

Building the Collection

Donations began to come in from collectors in the city who were interested in the newly founded museum being built in the park across town. The most important collections donated throughout those first few decades were the Morgan Whitney collection of Chinese jades in 1913, the Chapman H. Hyams collection of salon paintings in 1915, and the Hunt Henderson collection of French impressionists and 116 pieces by James McNeill Whistler in 1917.⁷ Subsequent important donations included the Samuel H. Kress Foundation’s gift of thirty Italian paintings in the 1930s⁸ and the Victor K. Kiam gift of 140 African works in 1977.⁹ These collections, along with other donations throughout the years, have amounted to NOMA’s sizable permanent collection. The

collection now boasts over 40,000 objects, and the museum is ranked among the top 25 percent of nation's important art museums.¹⁰

In addition to fortifying the permanent collection over the years, NOMA has embarked on key expansions of its physical space. A \$23 million project from 1991-1993 nearly doubled the museum's size, while the addition in the 2000s of the five-acre sculpture garden added an entirely new, outdoor element to the museum experience in City Park.¹¹ The museum sustained damage from Hurricane Katrina in its basement levels and around the grounds of the garden, but the museum was impacted most deeply by the loss of staff and funding due to the diaspora of the storm. The artwork itself, the public trust held by the museum, was not damaged. When one considers, however, the damage done to the museum's bone structure – its staff – in the wake of the storm, it is admirable and exciting to see how far they have come.

Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden

The Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden has been a key element in the renewed life of the New Orleans Museum of Art over the last six years. The garden sits adjacent to the museum in City Park and was funded by a campaign led by the trustees of the museum over a period of three years. The garden was also a direct result of the monetary and physical donation of the Besthoffs themselves, who began the garden's collection with their initial donation of forty contemporary pieces in 2001.¹² The Besthoffs have continued to add to the collection each year with new sculptures, varying from a few pieces at a time to ten or fifteen sculptures in a year. Open and free to the public, the sculpture garden does not assist the museum in any direct monetary way, but with its impressive collection of works by important artists ranging from Louisiana native Ida Kohlmeyer to the illustrious Louise Bourgeois, it most certainly helps to further the engagement of the public that is central to NOMA's mission. The sculpture garden drives a great many people into

the museum and it brings people back to the museum again and again, engaging the public and forging a relationship between the museum and the public. The sculpture garden bore the brunt of the damage caused by the floods after Hurricane Katrina hit, and it was reopened in 2010 with an official ribbon-cutting ceremony that underlined the importance of the garden's collection and space to the museum and the city of New Orleans.¹³

Management

NOMA has a standard management structure. A forty-eight member Board of Trustees oversees the organization, leaving the daily running of operations to the director. In September 2010, Susan M. Taylor replaced John Bullard, now director emeritus, who had been director of the museum for over thirty years. There are two assistant directors: Gail Asprodites, who handles business-side financials; and Lisa Rotondo-McCord, who handles artistic direction. A staff of thirty-seven includes curators for Asian Art (Lisa Rotondo-McCord's other major role in the museum), Native American & Pre-Columbian Art, Decorative Arts, Prints and Photography, and Contemporary Art, as well as directors of development, marketing, public programming, education, and publications. A network of volunteers and constantly-revolving interns helps round out a large staff that is remarkable considering the meager crew of sixteen that ran the museum from Baton Rouge just six years ago.

While NOMA has brought back its staff from smaller numbers, they still could use more in the departments directly responsible for the care of the artwork. The collections and registration departments are stretched thin and are constantly jumping from one project to another. They are often called in to help out the installation and exhibitions department, which requires significant staffing if only for the excessive care of a work of art, rather than "making it work" with fewer people. NOMA has been functioning without a Curator of Decorative Arts since the unexpected

death of John Keefe, the former curator, in February of 2011. The museum recently (September 2011) hired a new Curator of Prints and Photography to fill that position which had been open since late 2010. The education department lost its director toward the beginning of 2011 and the museum has not yet filled that position, nor has it been posted as open.

Collections and Registration Departments

I worked with the collections and registration departments, which function as one department although they are listed separately on NOMA's Organizational Chart (See Appendix A). Both departments are made up of two people each: Monika Cantin and Marie-Page Phelps, Associate Collections Managers; and Paul Tarver, the Registrar (who also fills the role of Curator of Native American and Pre-Columbian Art) and Jennifer Ickes, the Assistant Registrar. Typically, the registration department duties include all necessary tasks related to the collection when it is coming and going from the permanent location of the museum, either on loans to other museums or out for conservation, while the collections department takes charge of the collection while it remains, or is stored, "at home." Many museums, however, mix and match the duties and expectations of these departments due to their size, staffing constraints, and other factors.

At NOMA, the tasks typically fall along standard lines. For example, the assistant registrar handles all insurance information for incoming and outgoing loaned works, while the collections manager handles the Rights and Reproductions requests. The duties and actions overlap fairly often, however, between their two departments and also between their departments and the installation & exhibitions department, more commonly known as "the prep department." As with many mid-sized, regional museums, a few key employees fill numerous roles if and when they are needed, and often on a daily basis.

NOMA's Art Storage

Since 2005, the museum has been working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to update its disaster preparedness, including its storage procedures. The museum has four on-site storage areas: prints and photography, basement storage, Wisner One and Wisner Two. They also have an additional area, Hyams Storage, which functions as a temporary storage/holding area for framed prints, photographs, and paintings. Prints and Photography speaks for itself, and Wisner One is the main storage for large paintings, with a large series of mechanical aluminum art racks holding most of the important works (not currently on view) in NOMA's painting collection.

Wisner Two – made up of a group of compact modular shelving units, but designed with shelves and drawers for objects – and the basement art storage are both diverse in the collections and pieces they store. The discretion in choosing what pieces are stored in both of them is based on size requirements rather than stylistic categorization. The basement storage acts as a holding area for newly delivered pieces, as it was during my last days as an intern with the department, when the Nicole Eisenman pieces for the Prospect.2 installation were kept in the first bay of the basement storage until the previous exhibition was completely removed and the Great Hall cleaned and prepared for their installation. Wisner Two and the basement storage are both large enough to allow for projects to be worked on and they are the secondary “offices” of both the collections and registration departments.

Leadership Changes

NOMA has had an interesting and enlivening past two years. One of the most important developments was the retirement of longtime museum director, E. John Bullard. Bullard had been at the helm of the museum since 1972 when he was elected by the Board of Trustees, and he remains

the Director Emeritus, committed to leading the museum through the final exhibition of its centennial year, “Gifts for the Second Century—Celebrating the Centennial of the New Orleans Museum of Art,” opening in November of 2011.¹⁴ This commitment to the museum’s final major exhibit of its major year is representative of Bullard’s overall devotion not only to the administrative, but to the artistic direction of the museum over the course of his tenure. From the start of his time with the museum, Bullard made it clear that he hoped for and would pursue the opportunity to be “creatively involved in the art programs.”¹⁵

In addition to his dedication to maintaining the artistic integrity and economic and administrative health of NOMA, Bullard redefined the acquisitions policy of the museum within his first year of duty. His policy, as outlined in a report he wrote in 1973, was:

The New Orleans Museum of Art should concentrate its acquisition funds in several diverse areas: American art from the 18th century to the present; 20th century European art, particularly Surrealism; Pre-Columbian and African art; Spanish Colonial Painting and Sculpture; and Prints and Photographs.

Serious consideration and study should be given to the possibility of broadening the collection of the decorative arts, particularly if exhibition space outside the Museum becomes available. At the same time the Museum should keep abreast of developments in the art market for old master paintings and sculpture, drawings, and oriental art, so to be prepared to acquire quality works in these areas when available and within our financial range.¹⁶

Repercussions from the Bullard acquisitions policy are evident throughout the past thirty-eight years of NOMA’s existence. From this statement we can make broad correlations between the young director’s vision and the current, excellent holdings of NOMA’s Prints and Photography department, as well its Pre-Columbian and African art departments, both unique and fascinating collections that measure up against many of the comprehensive city museums around the country.

With the departure of E. John Bullard, the museum’s trustees conducted an eight-month search that resulted in the hiring of Susan Taylor, a former museum director with twenty-plus years experience who was, at the time, working for an urban development company in New Jersey after leaving her twelve-year tenure as the director of the Princeton University Art Museum in 2008.¹⁷ Taylor has been a positive presence at NOMA since she joined the museum, bringing an air of new life to the organization at a time when it is poised to be taking on new projects and making serious headway into its plans for the “next 100 years,” as its centennial exhibition literature reiterates. She has said that “modern children are bombarded with visual imagery every day,” referencing the importance of art in everyday life and the usefulness of a city art museum because “museums can help people see their world clearly.”¹⁸ Taylor brings fresh insight into the inner workings of NOMA as she takes the helm more completely upon Mr. Bullard’s full departure in January. Her new approaches and ideas for exhibitions that would (ideally) create conversations between the museum and the working artists in New Orleans are a positive sign for the future.

Public Programming

NOMA runs public opening and closing events for most of its major exhibitions which seek to educate the public about the culture represented in the exhibition. They also host a weekly music series in the Great Hall, called “Where Y’Art,” and a few annual, larger parties that function as both fundraisers and community events. “Love in the Garden” happens in September of each year and features an outdoor cocktail party in the sculpture garden, complete with a live musical act and food samplings from many of New Orleans’s top restaurants. NOMA’s annual major fundraiser, “Odyssey Ball,” occurs each November and is a black-tie affair with live and silent auctions, dinner and dancing.¹⁹

Budget

According to NOMA's Form 990 from 2009, the museum has an operating budget deficit of \$-962,446. Their total revenue in 2009 was \$5,476,994, with the largest revenue source being grants and contributions at \$3,968,164 and admissions revenue totaling roughly \$200,000. The museum's total expenses in 2009 were \$6,439,440, leading to the deficit, with salary expenses totaling \$2,679,367.

Chapter Two: The Internship

I began my internship in NOMA's Registration and Collections departments in June of 2011. I worked equally with the assistant registrar and the two collections managers; Monika Cantin, an associate collections manager, functioned as my official supervisor. Almost immediately, I was given responsibility for tasks that were normally a part of the daily duties of the people who actually work in the department. That was certainly a highlight of interning with an organization that has understaffing issues in essential departments: interns are offered a much better chance to do the hands-on work of a fulltime employee. As discussed in Chapter One, the two departments work very closely together, and often overlap. Once described to me as "the glue that holds the museum together," the registration and collections departments are in charge of the artwork. It sounds simple, but the job of minding the art requires extensive organization and encyclopedic coordination within the brain of the art storage surrounding your collection.

Work in Departments

For the majority of my four months with the collections and registration department (heretofore "the departments"), I worked directly with art objects in art storage. The projects were fascinating, if initially only for the sheer joy of actually handling the works of art that make up the museum's collection. Working in NOMA's collections department was unpredictable; the daily schedule was never completely known until that day occurred. Since the department overlaps so frequently with other departments, and because of NOMA's constant understaffing problem, the registrars and collections managers (and their interns) are often called away at a moment's notice to take on tasks external to the department.

For example, in late September 2011, I was conscripted to help with the deinstallation of *Thalassa*. *Thalassa* is a monumental work of art by the street artist Swoon (real name: Caledonia

Curry). The installation was the first in a new tradition of NOMA's: to have a major, contemporary artist create a site-specific installation piece for the museum each summer.²⁰ The piece filled NOMA's Great Hall with a ten-foot tall, central linoleum printed body figure and long tentacles made of finely cut papers of different thicknesses and textures reaching out from it to cover the Hall's balconies. It was installed in early June of 2011 by Swoon and her team of assistants along with the prep team of NOMA. Due to an email mix-up about who was supposed to be at the museum to take down the piece at the end of its exhibition, the prep department found themselves with a few hours to get the piece removed and our departments were called in to help.

When the collections managers and registrars at NOMA are asked to help install or de-install an exhibition or large piece, they essentially become additional members of the preparatory department. While installing the exhibition, "The Elegant Image: Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Bronzes from the Indian Subcontinent in the Siddharth K. Bhansali Collection," we completed tasks ranging from cleaning the insides and outsides of the Plexiglas case covers, to using a laser ruler to hang labels alongside the works of art, to covering the plywood "blocks" with stretched canvas to make the stands for individual sculptures and pieces. When helping to de-install the exhibition, "Ancestors of Congo Square: African Art in the New Orleans Museum of Art," housed in the gallery before the Bhansali show, we cut bubble wrap and acid-free paper to wrap the six carved temple door posts at the front of the gallery, as well as helping to peel off the last of the wall texts, images, and labels.

In an understaffed museum that continually works toward a shorter and shorter deadline, having an extra hand around can be extremely helpful for the department. However, while stepping in as a preparatory team member can make for an interesting and fun workday, collections managers and registrars are technically only supposed to be on hand during installations and break-downs to do their own jobs: registrars especially are expected to be on hand when works of art are moving, so

that they can supervise the handling of the piece. Their departments are in charge of the movement of the art work, and often they are some of the most highly trained employees in the methods of handling art, but their physical assistance should not be their primary role.

In addition to the physical tasks, there were a number of office-based duties that I was able to take on as a member of the department, including answering inquiries from the public and other museum workers and scholars. This highlights one of the other important functions of the registration or collections department in a museum: as Charles Hummel stated, “If carried out properly, this responsibility results in ‘one-stop shopping’ by staff and the public for information about [the] collection.”²¹ These departments are the keepers of the information about the collection, and so they are the experts to ask if and when anyone (be they curator, random visitor or graduate student) requires information about a piece in the museum’s collection. I answered questions about the provenance of a certain painting, the signature location on a different painting, and the exhibition history of a set of decorative works.

Deed-of-Gift Project

One other administrative task that I undertook and that has pertinence to the ongoing life of the department was the Deed-of-Gift project. This project involved going through each individual object’s paper file and determining – if the object was donated to the museum – that the donor had submitted his or her signed and executed Deed-of-Gift. While it sounds minor, this short document is very important: it grants to the museum whatever rights of ownership and future usage the donor abdicated when they donated the piece(s) to the museum. If full ownership rights are not transferred to the museum with the donation of a piece or if, for instance, it is a restricted gift (a category that stretches far and wide in its description, and can mean anything from “must always be on view to the public” to “must never be sold for any reason”), that will be detailed in the Deed-of-Gift as well.

The museum sends the Deed-of-Gift to the donor(s) when the donation occurs and it is expressly asked of the donors that they review and sign the document and return it to the museum at their earliest convenience.

Unfortunately, the Deed-of-Gift *is* just one piece of paper and it does look and sound minor, so many donors over the years have simply missed sending theirs in. By the time I finished my internship with NOMA, I had gone backwards through the years, 2011 through 1998, and I had compiled a database list of at least 2,200 objects that were without an executed Deed-of-Gift. While the curatorial staff claims the responsibility of sending additional copies of the deeds to those donors who have yet to complete their paperwork, it is up to the collections department to be aware of, and alert said curatorial staff to, the fact that so many were missing. The Deed-of-Gift is an important piece of the museum's legal position, but with lack of enough staff in the departments, the project lingered until there were available interns to take it on.

Work in Art Storage

In addition to days spent organizing and identifying unknown objects in storage, a series of projects involving four individual privately donated collections were my main objective during my summer with NOMA. The four collections were:

- The Harter Collection, a large collection of early century bronzes from India,
- The Kaufman Collection, a selection of pre-Columbian works,
- a selection of Good Earth Pottery, a longtime creative studio in Arkansas, and
- a 640-piece, specialized collection of sewing implements from the 19th and 20th centuries.

My tasks with these collections were related to NOMA's impending move of their permanent art storage to an off-site facility, and were done in the basement art storage, the center of operations for the move. As with any building in the city of New Orleans, it simply does not make

sense to keep anything of any value – and certainly not things of so much value and for which the museum is indebted to the public to protect – in the basement of a building. The departments see the impending move as a chance to ensure their accurate records of every single piece of work in long-term storage before it moves out of the building.

Thus, the projects I worked on directly involved updating and filling in records. I went through the boxes of each collection, which ranged from five to fifteen boxes of objects each, and identified the objects one by one. In an ideal world, the private donor who gives the collection to the museum will first get the collection appraised by an expert, and will provide the printed inventory and valuation to the museum as part of the donation (and tax deduction) process. Of course, a registrar is not always that lucky, in which case you have another instance of a project I encountered: searching through the entire database of pre-Columbian pieces, one record at a time, to see if any images or descriptions matched up with a selection of thirteen objects found in a large Tupperware container in the back corner of the basement.

For those collections with their inventories, however, the job was a step-by-step process of identifying and cataloging. First, each piece is unwrapped slowly. Then each piece is matched to its inventory entry and thus the individual accession number assigned to it by the registrar upon its entry into NOMA's permanent collection. A photograph is taken for identification and linked to the digital object record created in NOMA's database. The object records include basic information like accession numbers, object title, maker, category of art, measurements, and description. These records expand over the years to include any location changes of the object, loan information or provenance updates.

The lasting importance of my internship to NOMA would be the fact that I was doing the work that they would be doing themselves. While the interns may not be allowed to work in art

storage without the supervision of a department member, once in art storage the interns do much of the same work that the collection managers performed themselves. I helped the most by being there as an extra person on hand to help with the many projects that are left to the departments.

Chapter Three: The Issues (S/W/O/T)

An art museum, or any non-profit organization, must work toward its mission with every task it undertakes. Throughout everything, the sole purpose of NOMA is to be the steward of the city's art collection. To reiterate, the mission statement of NOMA reads as follows:

The mission of the New Orleans Museum of Art is to inspire the love of art; to collect, preserve, exhibit and present excellence in the visual arts; to educate, challenge and engage a diverse public.

In this chapter, I will break down the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that I observed during my time with the museum. I am undertaking this discussion from the point of view of the museum meeting its own goals as set forth in its mission statement.

STRENGTHS

The City of New Orleans

New Orleans presents a strength for the museum because of its wide-ranging diversity in population and artistic taste. There are many different kinds of artistic personalities in New Orleans, as evidenced by the diversity of the many arts organizations that are able to thrive in the city, from small to large. The city hosts nearly four major contemporary art gallery hubs (Julia Street, Royal Street, the St. Claude Arts District, and Magazine Street), a wide variety of performing arts organizations, and numerous other arts organizations, on both the institutional and the grassroots levels. The ability of these multiple organizations to all find audiences is proof that the community is out there, and NOMA has the tools to appeal to all of them. NOMA presents the visual arts, music, history, contemporary culture and even theater and films. With their participation in the 2011 New Orleans art biennial, Prospect.2, NOMA has shown that it is open to collaborations with the other arts organizations around the city and the country. Through all of their varied programming and opportunities, the museum has many opportunities to *educate, engage and challenge* its public. The population of New Orleans is full of art supporters who are looking to be educated, engaged and challenged. The museum can pick from any number of its artistic options to bring in audiences.

Communications Department

Grace Wilson has led the communications department as its director since late 2009. In the year and a half since her arrival, the communications department has increased the museum's presence in the technology-heavy world, especially in the social media sphere. While NOMA has a notoriously poor brand (to be discussed below under "Weaknesses"), Wilson has done an admirable job with what was available when she began. NOMA may have a sub-par website, but the

department has created a sizable and effective presence for the museum on Facebook and Twitter, and has been able to get the word out about successful theater collaborations (also to be discussed below, under Opportunities) and other interesting and new events and activities taking place at the museum.

An enormous banner has been hanging over the façade of a large hotel in downtown New Orleans, proclaiming NOMA's ongoing 100-year anniversary schedule, and has been a prominent part of Canal Street since its installation, encouraging more tourists to get out of the French Quarter and see the art museum (see Appendix C). This banner was just one part of NOMA's centennial year celebration marketing campaign that has led to an uptick in attendance at opening events and soirees. The communications department has managed to increase NOMA's visibility at a time when the institution still struggles so much with advances in technology (also to be discussed below, under Weaknesses).

Important and Loyal Donors (Besthoffs, Bhansali)

While working on the Deed-of-Gift project, I was offered a unique view into the donation records of the museum. Certain names come up over and over again. These committed donors represent a strength for an institution like NOMA. A museum relies on the donations that people are willing to make to the institution, and it is wonderful for a museum to find select members (or, even better, a robust cadre of members) of a community that are willing and able to donate important, or at least *good*, works of art on a fairly regular basis. In particular, the Besthoffs, Sydney and Walda, and Siddharth Bhansali are those ideal types of donors for a small, regionally-focused museum. Every few years, over the course of the last eight since its installation, the Besthoffs have made a substantial contribution to the collection of the Sculpture Garden. Siddharth Bhansali continues to make donations of Indian bronzes to the museum to the effect that a major show,

“The Elegant Image: Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Bronzes from the Indian Subcontinent in the Siddharth K. Bhansali Collection” was held during Fall 2011 to showcase his stunning collection. A truly symbiotic relationship, that between a museum and a substantial donor, of tax breaks and revenue made.

The Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden

The Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden holds “one of the most important sculpture installations in the country” in the beautiful setting of the live oak trees and lagoons of City Park.²² Free to the public, the Sculpture Garden constitutes one of the museum’s most important strengths, especially when it comes to introducing the museum to new audiences. Working behind the ticket counter at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, across town in the Central Business District (CBD) of New Orleans, I am often asked by visiting people about “other art activities” available in the city. The sculpture garden tops the list frequently, especially because of its affordability for all people, and the fact that the free entry does not mean a disappointing show, but quite the contrary: the sculpture garden collection stuns and surprises many people with its extensive collection of important works by some of the past century’s most important artists in the medium. The sculpture garden adds an outdoor element to the museum, one that is used to great advantage for museum events, collaborations with other organizations and event rentals.

Contemporary Art Department

Miranda Lash has been the Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at NOMA since 2008. While Lash’s personality seems to create problems on the staff side at times, her effect in furthering NOMA’s mission, “to inspire the love of art,” becomes clear when considering the amount of new audiences the contemporary art exhibitions have drawn over the past two years.

By highlighting the best parts of the contemporary collection and combining them with visiting artists and special exhibitions, the contemporary art department has maintained an exciting revolution of modern, edgy arts programming. In 2009, the department showcased home-town hero Skylar Fein in his first solo show at a museum just four years after his career began, and the crowds on opening night turned NOMA into a “scene more like Frenchmen Street between sets than a genteel arts institution.”²³ Fein’s work, which in this instance featured oversized recreations of memorabilia and other ephemera from punk and rock shows of the 1980s, was ideal for bringing in a large and raucous crowd that would not normally attend a Saturday night event at their local art museum.

Following up the Skylar Fein show, Lash kept up the musical, youthful momentum, and scheduled “Parallel Universe: Quintron and Miss Pussycat Live at City Park.” This exhibition focused on Quintron and Miss Pussycat, a musician and puppeteer, respectively, who are local heroes practicing in music-based performance art. Via an arrangement worked out between Quintron and Lash, the musician worked at NOMA on a daily basis as an on-going, live art project, creating his newest album with works of art from NOMA’s permanent collection hung around him for inspiration.²⁴ Getting an artist to create on the spot in the museum as a way of bringing in more people worked, and became another feather in the cap of the contemporary art department.

The opening of “Wayne Gonzales: Dark to Light/Light to Dark” in October 2011 shows the department’s increasing pull in the arts world.²⁵ This is the first solo exhibition Gonzales has ever had and, though born in Arabi, he has worked in New York City for most of his career so it would not have been surprising for one of the NYC venues to host the show instead. The department also works with the events department to host talks with those working artists that can be brought in, and they are frequently well-attended and positively spoken of in the arts community.

WEAKNESSES

Use of Technology

NOMA's lack of advancement in the technological aspect of running a museum seriously hinders its advancement in the arts community of New Orleans. As a relatively young city²⁶, the New Orleans population expects a level of technological involvement and advertisement that NOMA does not reach in its current state.

The museum's notoriously terrible website anchors their technological issues. An organization's website is its most basic and essential marketing tool and, even if pictures, tweets, and all the other add-ons available in today's world are omitted, the website needs to be an informational and user-friendly face of the museum. NOMA's website does none of these things. Unattractive and counter-intuitive, the website does little to make the museum look exciting as an attraction. Add to this the fact that NOMA has been "working on" the website since at least 2009, and the importance of a website upgrade comes into greater focus.

The museum also suffers from internal communication problems, related to a general lack of technology and resistance to change over the years. The museum offices are a labyrinth of narrow hallways with pod-like sections of office rooms off the opposite ends; the working spaces do not lend themselves to a dialogue between different departments. Problems arise from the inability of one department or worker to properly inform all of the other relevant departments or workers. Meetings take place, but can leave pertinent people out by mistake, leading to a need for a follow-up mini-meeting between people which ends up wasting more time and can lead to animosity between co-workers.

The arrival of Susan Taylor as director seemed to signal to a lot of people on the museum staff that technological upgrades such as those indicated above would finally be made, but that point has not yet been reached. Taylor decreed that all staff members would have an email address so that all internal communication could be made by email, with the idea that an email can be easily copied to everyone necessary, and no one would be left out of the necessary communication. What was not taken into consideration was the fact that many important staff members had not been issued email addresses for many years due to the fact that their positions did not lend themselves to computer work. Their workspaces are not offices and their daily tasks do not require word processing or the internet. When the email addresses were passed out, it was not assured that there were actually computers available to all of those staff members that would need to check said new inbox. Now, everyone has an email address, and everyone gets the emails in their inboxes, but without a computer in the office they are not able to check the many emails that may be there waiting. This leads to further problems when it is assumed that “everyone got the email.”

NOMA also suffers slightly in the social media area of technology. While the museum does have the now-standard Facebook page and Twitter account, neither gets consistently updated on a daily basis. The Twitter account incorporates candid photography and quick bursts of information as daily events unfold, while the Facebook page remains more static, presenting the formal art museum image with photo albums from opening and closing events, longer messages about upcoming events, and information about how and when to buy tickets (See Appendices D & E). Both Facebook and Twitter present a more contemporary view of the museum than its website manages, but still, neither stands out as portraying the museum as exciting.

Brand

NOMA's overall brand constitutes a similar problem to that of its technological problems. Mainly a function of NOMA's refusal for so long to come into the 20th century, NOMA has often relied on the fact that it is "The New Orleans Museum of Art," and so people will naturally come to visit them if they come to the city and are looking for art. However, in a city so heavily doused in artistic expression, the museum needs to do a better job of proving why it is a stand-out location to visit. The fact that it is not located downtown, within the common walking distance from standard tourist areas, adds to the need for a stronger pull. The large banner on Canal Street is an attempt to do just that: intrigue the visitors in downtown New Orleans to seek out NOMA, especially during its centennial celebration.

NOMA's brand needs to overcome simply being "the art museum." Many people, when asked about their local art museum, conjure up images of cold, quiet marble rooms holding endless walls of oil paintings. During this transitional time in NOMA's leadership and curatorial staff, the museum hoped to overcome those stereotypes, and to instead focus potential visitors on the contemporary collection and the new collaborations and events taking place for its centennial celebration. The museum launched a separate website, www.noma100.com, to honor the entire year's series of exhibitions and program. This new website has a more modern design than the museum's main website and it provides a timeline of NOMA's history, an outline of all of the exhibitions planned for the celebration year, and more images and stand-out information that makes the museum look less like an old mausoleum and more like a destination for art lovers, history buffs, and cultural prowlers alike. It was not clear at the time of this writing whether the museum intends to permanently shift to that newer interface at the end of the centennial year, or if that website's information will be integrated back into the original website design.

Public Programming

Through its public programming schedule, NOMA upholds its mission to educate, challenge and engage a diverse public.²⁷ The museum uses the openings and closings of their major exhibitions to hold educational events that are also fun for museum visitors. For the unveiling of the Swoon piece, *Thalassa*, the museum brought in a live band and DJ and threw a well-attended party after first providing a lecture with Miranda Lash and the artist. For the closing of the “The Elegant Image,” the museum held a closing celebration in place of its weekly “Where Y’Art” Friday night event. This celebration included dancers performing both folk and classical Indian dancing, musicians performing classical Indian music, a walk-through with the curator, and a DiWali (Festival of Lights) celebration to round out the evening.²⁸ These events underline NOMA’s focus in its programming on providing art, providing an education about that art, and also providing a way to have fun with and personally enjoy that art.

The closing night of “The Elegant Image” also featured a talk from a series that is another one of NOMA’s ongoing public events, the Director’s Dialogues. These semi-quarterly events are described by NOMA as:

The program, which brings museum leaders from across the country to New Orleans to discuss innovations in practice, will address topics such as diversity, technology, education, permanent collections, and new audience development. NOMA Director Susan M. Taylor will moderate these illuminating discussions.²⁹

The Director’s Dialogues should bring in large crowds, considering the ability of Taylor and other NOMA employees to get directors from such well-known institutions as the Barnes Foundation and the Brooklyn Museum. Unfortunately, most of the Director’s Dialogues have been inconsistently attended.

The museum's weekly series, "Where Y'Art," does not manage to bring in large numbers either. Part of the problem is likely due to the fact that Where Y'Art is held every Friday night and thus it finds itself in competition with many other options around the city, where residents and visitors never lack for "things to do." Another major issue may be the fact that you cannot find a schedule for the series anywhere on NOMA's website or Facebook page. The museum has made it nearly impossible for a potential visitor to come across a listing, note a favorite artist performing on an upcoming Friday, and gather people together to make an outing of it. The museum does advertise the event on the day of, via local radio station WWOZ and the local NPR affiliate, WWNO, but with the simple addition of a website schedule, they could be reaching many more people.

Permanent Collection – Breadth of Collection

NOMA has gained solid holdings in many areas of art history, with special recognition going to its collections of French paintings, African art, and the Decorative Arts. John Bullard's decision to expand the Prints and Photography collection, as discussed in the Organizational History, also worked in the museum's favor. The growth of the collection was hindered from its inception, however, due to the desire of many of the original board members to maintain the museum as a regionally-focused collection, with an eye toward proving that their local art was just as worthy as those pieces that may be donated from around the world. While this has led to a unique blend of strongly regional and strongly international holdings in the collection, it has also held the museum back from collecting those large, "important" pieces that are known by art historians and the public at large and that will bring in larger crowds.

While Bullard helped make great advances in collection-building while director of the museum, he also did a potential disservice to the museum by being almost *too accepting* of donations

from collectors. The museum finds itself burdened with many pieces of work that are not quite valuable enough to excite collectors, not quite obscure or rare enough to excite enthusiasts, and not aesthetically interesting or engaging enough to excite random visitors. The Decorative Arts collection has grown to include a staggering amount of Egyptian and Roman glass pieces and an 82-piece Faberge collection³⁰, but it may not be the type of art that typically brings visitors back over and over again. More accessible parts of the permanent collection, like the impressive prints and photographs collection are under-utilized due to staffing.

Permanent Collection – Art Storage

The permanent collection storage space at NOMA was outlined in Chapter One. The lack of space for NOMA to effectively manage its collection is a serious issue for the museum. The museum has, for too long, used these three storage spaces to keep any number of pieces jumbled together. The Hyams storage area – in reality a closed-off gallery with a stronger lock installed on the door – is particularly dangerous, as works of art are stacked inside it against the walls and in large boxes along aisles. Leaning a variety of different framed works together against the walls and shelving can only lead to eventual damage. Additionally, a storage policy of “put it where it fits” creates problems when cataloging an object’s location and trying to find it at a later date. The collections management team has done what it can to make the best of the situation that they are in with the space they have, but it does not live up to the standards that NOMA should be meeting as the institution in charge of protecting artwork for the city of New Orleans.

The Board of Trustees

NOMA’s Board constitutes a weakness for the organization because of their notorious reluctance to change and make positive advancements on part of the museum. Board members over the years have agreed with Ellsworth Woodward’s desire that the museum should remain regionally

focused in its scope and they do not hold much interest in making changes that they feel would confuse the point of NOMA's existence. The large size of NOMA's board also means that serious decisions can be more difficult to make, and seemingly quick issues can be held up by the opinions of individual members. With its different committees (eleven in total), the board has been designed to break up decision-making tasks among the many trustees, but this often leads to bureaucratic obstruction rather than speed in decision making. Additionally, while there is an Executive Committee, it is not empowered to make decisions on behalf of the board without majority approval from the entire board, which can be difficult to attain in a timely manner.

OPPORTUNITIES

Permanent Collection – New Storage

With the upcoming move to the new, offsite storage facility, NOMA has a prime opportunity to fix almost all of the problems that they face with their current long-term art storage situation. The collections and registration departments have been working on a solid re-inventorying of all unknown and/or unorganized collections of objects and a large amount of their days are taken up with these projects, as discussed in Chapter Two. The top priority of the departments, they recognize in this move the opportunity to get right what has been wrong for many years of record-keeping.

These heads of the departments will also be in charge of designing the new space as far as shelving and painting racks placement goes. They will be able to create modular shelving units that are suited directly to the collection they have, rather than attempting to make an antiquated storage space work for a collection that has changed much over the twenty years since their current long-term art storage was designed.

Once completed, the off-site move will free up an entire half of the basement storage now overtaken by long-term storage, and the departments will be able to maximize their in-storage workspace. The proper care of the artwork requires space and the ability to move through it without obstacle. This move of long-term storage to a new site should lead to the departments being able to do their jobs better: when works of art are moved through the storage areas, it will not be such a danger due to the crowding in of aisles. Entire afternoons will not have to be devoted to reorganizing boxes to make more space for an object being brought in from the galleries.

Collaborations

NOMA has already found great success in its collaborative projects with local theater company, The NOLA Project. The NOLA Project has been putting on plays in the city since 2005. They have a strong and loyal following and they choose productions that range from “an original comedy about the tragedy that is public education,” to their most recent production of William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which was staged over three locations outside in the Sculpture Garden.³¹ The first run of performances of *Midsummer...*, held in the spring of 2011, attracted over two thousand visitors to the Sculpture Garden and led to another second run of performances, held in October of the same year.³² In the summer of 2011, another cooperative effort led to The NOLA Project’s production of Yasmina Reza’s play, *Art*, in NOMA’s Stern Auditorium.

Providing a stage for theater aligns with NOMA’s statement of vision that says it will strive to be “a premier National visual arts museum vital to the cultural and educational life of our city, state and region.”³³ Bringing theater audiences into the museum to see productions helps the museum introduce itself to those people who may not have been there before. The success of a good play at the museum only doubles that effect, leading people to invest in both the theater company’s future performances and NOMA’s future presentations. This is an occasion of arts organizations working together in a truly collaborative way where both organizations benefit and the public is offered the opportunity to witness a work of art. In addition to the mutual benefits in public attendance gained from the collaborative effort, the museum stands to gain from the shared marketing efforts of involving another arts organization.

New Staff in Directorial and Curatorial Departments

A statement by NOMA's new director brings into focus multiple aspects of the recent hires by the museum:

“We are proud to welcome Russell Lord to NOMA and New Orleans,” said Director Susan Taylor, “His interest in and study of the relationships between photography, other artistic media, and modern life are a perfect match for the museum’s mission of combining scholarship with accessibility and engaging a broad range of audiences with new and exciting exhibitions, publications, and public programs.”³⁴

The hires of both Lord and Taylor are indications of NOMA's attempts to move itself forward.

Taylor brings a more youthful energy along with her many years of experience, and Lord has had all of his career-building experience working with photography in New York City, which remains, as ever, the default center of the universe, and helps with his appeal as a draw to potential audiences.

Both are younger than previous holders of their respective positions, and show the potential for further attempts at expanding NOMA's influence in the arts community of New Orleans.

Under Taylor's administration, and for the first time in the festival's history, NOMA is open this year during the music festival VOODOO Music Experience, taking place in City Park from October 28-30, 2011. The festival takes place literally behind the museum, yet NOMA has remained closed all three previous years of the festival, sending a signal to the concertgoers that they were not welcome at the museum. The decision of the new director to keep the museum open during this festival shows her commitment to making the museum accessible to all people.

New Direction

As NOMA moves forward under the leadership of its board of trustees and new director, it has an opportunity to fix those weaknesses in its presentation of itself to the public. The leadership of Taylor, who has pledged to “forge a new role for NOMA as a city-wide gathering place for the

arts,”³⁵ could bring into agreement those on the board who worry about making any changes in NOMA’s operating methods. Taylor and the staff of the museum have already shown that the museum can be successful when it programs accessible, educational events and exhibitions in contemporary art. They have also proven that new approaches to presenting the permanent collection can prove NOMA’s historical significance on a national level while also appealing to diverse audiences within their community.

Along with the updated artistic and educational objectives of the museum, NOMA has the opportunity to integrate the positive attributes of the NOMA 100 campaign into its ongoing marketing efforts. Taylor has listed “introducing new technology” as one of her top priorities.³⁶ Along with updating technology among the staff, NOMA can create a more effective presence for itself with a new website and heightened activity on Facebook and Twitter. Listing clear schedules and presenting interesting background information will help NOMA to present a contemporary and exciting public face with a proper historical foundation.

THREATS

Understaffing in Critical Departments

NOMA has a stable staff of thirty-seven, but it could use more people, particularly in those departments in which I did my internship work. The preparatory team, especially, would benefit from the addition of more staff members. As an intern, it may have been entertaining to be pulled in on a moment's notice to help take apart a Swoon piece, but it also shows the extreme need of the department. While the Registrars and Collections Managers were busy folding up pieces of cut paper, they were not working on re-inventorying the long-term art for the storage move, and they were not responding to inquiries from the public or fulfilling their other duties.

Similarly, the collections department would also benefit from an additional staff person. When the departments complete their move to the off-site long-term storage, the entirety of the art storage that is considered short-term (including those objects that stay at the museum always, no matter how long they are scheduled to remain in art storage) can be reorganized to maximize the space that will become available. In order to facilitate that reorganization in a timely manner, without letting the daily necessary tasks of the department fade into the background, the collections department needs an additional member. This will ensure that all of the work gets done, and that the reorganization happens both quickly and with all necessary regard for the safety of the collection.

Other Local Arts Organizations

The New Orleans Museum of Art could lose the battle to be the “go-to” art museum for visitors to the city. As discussed previously, they are not downtown and immediately available to the tourist population that may wander by the Ogden Museum of Southern Art or the Contemporary Arts Center, or even the Historic New Orleans Collection, which quite often hosts art-related

exhibitions. Without proper execution of appropriate and effective marketing to the populations of people that visit the city and stay in the French Quarter and Garden District, NOMA will continue to have a difficult time of getting large numbers of visitors through the museum.

The other large institutions in town host their own events that often rival NOMA's. In particular, the Ogden's weekly music-and-art event, "Ogden After Hours," happens every Thursday and attracts larger audiences than NOMA's "Where Y'Art." While NOMA's location at the top of the Canal Street streetcar line does make it relatively convenient to get out to the museum from downtown New Orleans, the museum needs to do a better job of convincing potential visitors that the streetcar ride is worth it. Once the visitor has wandered in and out of the CAC and the Ogden, adding in most likely the National World War II Museum (located next to both the CAC and the Ogden, and helping both of those institutions in their foot traffic numbers), visitors may not feel up to taking a long streetcar or taxi ride across the city to spend more time indoors looking at art. NOMA has to become the exciting and necessary first stop.

Resistance to Change

NOMA falls victim to the typical problems of older non-profit arts organizations: that of the "old guard" trustees and members who sometimes wish things would never change at the museum or in its programming. Before John Bullard's retirement, NOMA seemed mired in itself, simply pushing along and trying to maintain itself financially while recovering from storm damage. With the addition of Susan Taylor, the museum seems poised to move forward with updates in the way it does business and the ways in which it collects its art and grows its collection. However, NOMA could continue to rest on its laurels as the city's art museum and not take the steps necessary to bring them forward into more prominence in the arts community of New Orleans. They may lose

sight of the challenges they need to be making to their community, rather than placating it by offering exhibitions it assumes they will like.

More tangible to define, NOMA may continue to resist bringing itself into the 21st century technologically. If the museum continues to neglect their aging website and if it does not use its strong social media tools more effectively and more often, the museum will lose out on creating new audience members. NOMA must remind the entire community of New Orleans why it is a vital cog in the artistic machine of the city.

Chapter Four: Best Practices

AAM Code of Ethics for Museums

The American Association of Museums exists to write codes and standards for museums across the country. The AAM has a rigorous accreditation process that requires strict adherence of the organization under review to its stated mission as well as to AAM's published best practices and standards. The process lasts roughly two years and includes self-assessment by the organization and site visits from teams of AAM officials.³⁷ NOMA is fully accredited by the AAM, and is one of only twelve AAM accredited museums in Louisiana. The museum should be maintaining practices in line with those described in AAM's published documents.

The AAM's standardized examples of best practices tie all museums together in their commitment to serving the public, and the documents that they provide outline a skeleton structure from which most museums create their own working policies and procedures. The idea is simple:

In subscribing to this code...Museums, thereby, affirm their chartered purpose, ensure the prudent application of their resources, enhance their effectiveness, and maintain public confidence. This collective endeavor strengthens museum work and the contributions of museums to society – present and future.³⁸

The “Code of Ethics for Museums” is the primary document in AAM's best practices library, providing a broad groundwork for the foundation and purpose of any museum, be it art-, science-, or history-based (see Appendix F).³⁹ The three main principles of this code are Governance, Collections, and Programs. NOMA's commitment to aligning its mission and work with these three principles is a good starting point for discovering how and where the museum might need to improve, if anywhere.

I. Governance

Museums are to be led by a governing body that is in charge of the overall stewardship of the museum in the long-term. AAM explains:

The governing authority protects and enhances the museum's collections and programs and its physical, human, and financial resources. It ensures that all these resources support the museum's mission, respond to the pluralism of society, and respect the diversity of the natural and cultural common wealth.⁴⁰

NOMA's board works to protect and enhance the museum collection, as well as its financial resources. The large size of NOMA's board suggests continuous financial assistance and artistic donations, although that is not always the case. The board typically meets once a month, with the departments of the museum being offered the opportunity to submit issues that require board action. The board appoints the museum director and then delegates the daily management of the museum to that director, but they are infamous for hindering new actions that attempt to respond to the ever-changing "pluralism of society." While they present a unified front and maintain a level of integrity for the museum's image in the donor sphere, NOMA's board would benefit from more elasticity. The board seems ready to allow Susan Taylor the flexibility and freedom to take on new objectives and to "deepen the museum's commitment to contemporary art and artists,"⁴¹ which signals positive changes from the board in regards to exhibition planning being left to the artistic directors of the museum.

II. Collections

AAM's standards regarding collections will be explored further in the following section, as they have published an entire set of standards regarding this

preeminent charge of the museum. To quote AAM again, “museums make their unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world.”⁴² A museum’s core purpose relates to the management and presentation of its collection. The AAM standards list many ways that collections management can and should be performed to maintain the highest standards, but the central goal is this:

[The] stewardship of collections entails the highest public trust and carries with it the presumption of rightful ownership, permanence, care, documentation, accessibility, and responsible disposal.⁴³

NOMA’s collections department team uses all of its collective powers to ensure that they are protecting and maintaining the permanent collection to the standards at which it should be, and the work they have been doing over the past year to maintain and update their database and records shows further commitment to their vision of NOMA’s collection being fully accounted for and documented. While the AAM standard is 90% of the permanent collection being catalogued and represented visually, NOMA’s collection department has set its goal at 100%, and with the upcoming move to their off-site long-term storage facility, they are using every opportunity they can to make up for the holes in the collections database.

III. Programs

Public programming run by the museum throughout the year exists side by side in importance with collections stewardship. Their commitment to the public extends beyond just collecting and preserving works of art, and also extends beyond presenting those works of art in a beautiful and appropriate setting. Without the words of the curator beside the painting, we may appreciate the work on a visceral

level, but we learn nothing from it of the culture from which it was created, the person who put the brush to canvas, nothing of the subject. Programming in a museum functions on the same level: the programs are there to fill in the blanks of accessibility for the public, to educate them about different cultures so that they may understand and more fully appreciate the art that they are seeing (we hope). Without good programming and educational events, the museum is simply a presenter of old things behind glass. The AAM elaborates:

Museums serve society by advancing an understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural common wealth through exhibitions, research, scholarship, publications, and educational activities.⁴⁴

NOMA incorporates lectures, dancing, theater and workshops for children and adults into its events in an attempt to be “accessible and encourage participation of the widest possible audience consistent with its mission and resources.”⁴⁵ As discussed in Chapter Three, NOMA has some pitfalls in its programming, and much of the hesitation among the trustees and longer-term employees shows resistance to updating their programs. Considering this uncertainty, it is interesting to note that those events that have truly challenged the typical audience of NOMA were some of the most successful in recent years (examples include the popularity of the Quintron and Miss Pussycat exhibition and the crowds present for the Skylar Fein opening). The museum’s leaders need to have confidence in the fact that they have an interesting and vast collection that can and should be used in more ways than just those that have been done traditionally. As arts/non-profit guru Michael Kaiser constantly reminds us, “good art, well marketed,” will always bring in crowds and help your institution maintain its mission and its fiscal health.⁴⁶

AAM Accreditation Commission's Expectations Regarding Collections Stewardship

Underscoring the importance of the role of the museum as a public trust that protects works of art for the public's benefit, the AAM makes a thorough review of the collections policies and procedures a priority in their process of reviewing and accrediting museums. The Association's ideal expectations are described in a document last approved by the AAM on December 17, 2004 (see Appendix G) and they begin by describing the importance of the department:

Possession of collections incurs legal, social, and ethical obligations to provide proper physical storage, management, and care for the collections and associated documentation, as well as proper intellectual control. Collections are held in trust for the public and made accessible for the public's benefit. Effective collections stewardship ensures that the objects the museum owns, borrows, holds in its custody, and/or uses are available and accessible to present and future generations.⁴⁷

The AAM elaborates further with its checklist of requirements for a museum to be creditable by their standards. They are:

An creditable museum must demonstrate that it:

1. Owns, exhibits, or uses collections that are appropriate to its mission,
2. Legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections,
3. Conducts collections-related research according to appropriate scholarly standards,
4. Strategically plans for the use and development of its collections,
5. Guided by its mission, provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation,
6. Allocates its space and uses its facilities to meet the needs of the collections, audience, and staff,
7. Has appropriate measures in place to ensure the safety and security of people, its collections and/or objects, and the facilities it owns or uses,
8. Takes appropriate measures to protect itself against potential risk and loss.⁴⁸

NOMA could stand behind its collections stewardship accreditation based on the first five

points on the AAM's list. However, it would have a more difficult time demonstrating the last three. While NOMA's team is allocating its space and using its facilities to the best of their ability at this point, the problem remains that that space and those facilities are not adequate to provide for the full protection and proper storage of every single piece in the permanent collection.

NOMA has a team of collections stewards that are trying to maintain the utmost integrity in an atmosphere that is not conducive to best practices. The off-site storage move will help NOMA's space constraints, but they will need to be sure to maintain the collections practices outlined by the AAM above when making the changes and updates throughout their moving process. The departments have been working together over the last year to finalize their own revised set of internal standards for collection maintenance, including the standard methods they will use for numbering objects in the database and physically with paint, entering information about objects that may be incomplete, and the ways in which they track the movement of objects throughout the museum and when objects leave the museum on loan to other institutions. The proper stewardship of the museum's collection relates directly to the ongoing success of the museum as a whole.

Rebranding Efforts of Similarly-Sized Art Museums

NOMA has a brand problem, as identified above, but the problem is not as simple as needing a new logo or a change in website design. Rather, NOMA needs to comprehensively overhaul the way in which the public views the museum. Both the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Portland Art Museum have undergone large-scale strategic rebranding campaigns in recent years. Portland recently rebranded in September and October of 2011; while Cleveland has been running a longer campaign coinciding with a major expansion of the museum over the last six years. A brief examination of both of these rebranding efforts will offer a view of the issues NOMA may face as it continues to move in new directions.

I. **Portland Art Museum**

The Portland Art Museum (PAM) launched its new brand with a press release dated September 13, 2011. The release states: “the goal of the new brand is to bring together the Museum’s past with its future, connecting the institution with current and new audiences.”⁴⁹ Before enlisting a local PR firm to assist them in creating their new logo and refocusing their overall public image, the museum went through “...a strategic planning process, identifying short-term and long-term goals for the institution and reaffirming the core values and mission of the Museum.”⁵⁰ A well-defined mission and coherence to that mission are the keys to any successful rebranding, or any successful running of a museum for that matter. Thus, strategic planning should be a part of any museum’s life cycle, and especially when the organization stands ready to reposition itself in the public consciousness.

Following their strategic planning, the PAM worked with Ziba Design, a Portland-based public relations firm, to create a new logo for the museum, moving from a blockish graphic of the words “Portland Art Museum,” to a bulbous, block red “P” (See Appendix H). The museum’s director, Brian Ferriso, described the new logo as “authentic and bold, paying homage to our past while also increasing the visibility of this vital 119-year old institution, connecting it in an emphatic way with our 21st-century audiences.”⁵¹ The logo represents one of the museum’s attempts to show the public their intent to move both forward and away from the years preceding Ferriso as director, when the previous director focused the museum on large, corporate donations to host a Blockbuster-heavy schedule that has left the current administration with a debt of \$15 million. The museum now wants to focus not only on the international art scene, but on the specific interests and desires of

their immediate community. They hope to use their revised, contemporary logo as an immediate, visceral indication of that intention.⁵²

The work of the Portland Art Museum shows that a rebranding effort should always begin with a good, hard look in the mirror. An arts organization that finds that its public brand no longer fully represents the past, present and future of the institution must take the first step in correcting that by running a thorough analysis of itself. Only then will they be able to have the full strength of a unified institution with renewed vision behind them when they do roll out the new brand.

II. The Cleveland Museum of Art

The expansion and rebranding process that the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) has undertaken over the last six years illustrates how a project can be successful: if the public is kept informed and feels involved and if the museum maintains its commitment to its mission throughout.

The impetus for the rebranding of the Cleveland Museum of Art came from a different place than that of the Portland Art Museum. The CMA's collection has been growing for years, and it houses many important pieces of art in the canon of art history. While the museum has had expansions of its gallery space in the past, it has been in the midst of a major, \$350 million dollar expansion since 2005 which will increase its overall gallery space by more than 30 percent, while providing numerous other details to the museum, including a vast atrium and two, glass-encased sculpture galleries.⁵³

At about the same time as the multi-year expansion project began, the CMA made the decision to change its long-time logo; interestingly, their old logo was similar to Portland's, with the emphasis being on the organization's name written

graphically, rather than a symbol that represents the organization in one compact image. The museum worked with a PR firm in New York City to design a new, more contemporary logo that pays homage to both the original 1916 building, and the once-reviled-now-loved thick granite stripes that run through the façade of the 1971 education building addition, designed by Marcel Breuer (See Appendix I).⁵⁴

Thus, the opportunity for a rebranding and refocusing of their priorities and place in the community presented itself to the CMA, rather than the CMA went looking for it. Cleveland also recently experienced a change in leadership like NOMA, appointing David Franklin as their new director in late 2010. The public expects the new director to “...lead the programs, exhibitions and acquisitions that will bring the expanded institution back to life – and justify one of the biggest cultural investments in Ohio history.”⁵⁵ As the CMA grows in international significance, they still do their best to maintain their close relationship with the city. The museum has a specific endowment to keep it free, in line with the original wishes of the founders, and so many locals visit the museum often and for shorter periods of time, popping in when they can to catch up on new works or old favorites. Instead of keeping wings shut off during the long, continuing expansion, the museum has done its best to keep as much open as possible, even decorating tunnels and nicknaming them “Art Detours” to keep the noticing of inconveniences to a minimum.⁵⁶

The museum also has a prominent “Building Project” section on their website which breaks down the expansion plan in simple terms, and keeps the public feeling involved. The information is three simple paragraphs, with basic headings: “What We’re Doing,” “Why We’re Doing It,” and “What to Expect.” The museum

states clearly their intention that the expansion and renovations, when completed, “...stand to play a leadership role in shaping the region’s quality of life and economic rebirth.”⁵⁷

A strategic plan led to the board of the CMA’s decision to embark upon this long and expensive expansion project, because it was recognized that the museum could no longer function and increase its collection without providing itself with new spaces. While the expansion began, they took the opportunity to use their already increased public spotlight by reminding the community and the nation of their immense and important holdings.

Standard Practices of Other Local Arts Organizations

As mentioned in their Strengths above, the New Orleans Museum of Art has on its side the fact of its name and existence: it *is* the New Orleans Museum of Art. Their well-positioned name cannot maintain them forever though, and as the years pass by and the arts community of New Orleans grows, other organizations in town may threaten their success. As the only other art museum in the city*, the Ogden Museum of Southern Art is the major competitor to NOMA’s success as the “go-to” art museum of the locals and tourists. The Historic New Orleans Collection, while not primarily an art museum, serves much of the same population of the city’s arts appreciators.

I. The Ogden Museum of Southern Art

The Ogden Museum of Southern Art is ideally located for foot traffic: directly across the street from the enormous (and by far the most visited museum in

* A case could be made for the Contemporary Arts Center as a rival in the presentation of visual arts, but, as they hold no permanent collection of works, and identify themselves as a “multi-disciplinary arts center,” they will be left out of this discussion.

the city) National World War II Museum and the popular Contemporary Arts Center, and just blocks from Julia Street, the center of the contemporary art gallery scene in the city. This makes it perfectly poised to bring in numerous people from accidental walk-bys alone, but that is not the only key to the Ogden's popularity.

The Ogden has a wide-ranging collection that covers painting, craft and photography from the American South over the last one hundred and fifty years. Their curators rotate out the permanent collection galleries fairly often, as they often have temporary, large exhibitions that take up gallery space. These shows have been wide-ranging and highly popular, highlighting private collections of outsider art, photographic collections by contemporary photographers and past greats like Walker Evans, and retrospective shows by contemporary painters like French Quarter native, George Dureau.⁵⁸

The Ogden exhibition, "Ersy and Josephine Sacabo," which opened October 13, 2011, was described in an extensive weekend article in *The New York Times* (see Appendix J), and my time as a visitor sales associate with the Ogden has allowed me ample opportunity to witness how many out-of-town visitors have been seeking out the Ogden in their trips to New Orleans. The museum successfully challenges and engages their visitors with their interesting juxtapositions of artists and their photographic exhibitions, and they have drawn the following praise from the local media:

Some three years in the making, this exhibition of two sui generis New Orleans artists, along with the George Dureau expo upstairs, offers new evidence of the Ogden Museum's potential as a showcase for providing striking new insights that would have been unlikely anywhere else, here or abroad.⁵⁹

In addition to their successful mix of permanent and temporary collection shows, the Ogden has a weekly event series, called “Ogden After Hours,” that combines art (the entire museum is open and available during this event), music, food and drink. The museum has a designated music curator, Libra Lagrone, who brings in musical acts each week that range far and wide, from honky-tonk country, to traditional New Orleans jazz, to funk, to bounce, to folk music, to opera and cello soloists. With a low admission fee (\$10 for all non-members) and the availability of an affordable bar and pop-up food menu, the Ogden has created an accessible and interesting weekly event for museum members, families (there is always an incorporated children’s art activity table), and young professionals who work in the CBD. The Ogden has an active marketing scheme of social media and billboards, and their close relationship with radio station WWOZ allows them to get the word out about their music series to music fans, making for an ideal mix of current audiences and new for each After Hours event.

The Ogden also maintains a strong brand presence, with a highly recognizable logo: a large red square with a white, block “O” in the center. With their well-defined niche of collection definition, the Ogden has found great success, especially for a museum that was only founded in 1999. They are a testament to the need for a museum to have a strong and easily recognizable brand, a definite mission and purpose, and an ability to communicate both of those things to the public in ways that bring in all kinds of people and not just the standard “museum crowd.”

II. The Historic New Orleans Collection

The Historic New Orleans Collection (HNOC) stands in an even more opportune location than the Ogden Museum of Southern Art. Directly in the center of the French Quarter, HNOC gains most of its audience attention from the hundreds of visitors that pass through the historic district every day. HNOC hosts historic home tours, runs a research center, maintains a publishing house, and displays works of art and artifacts from its 35,000 piece collection in its group of 10 Louisiana History galleries.⁶⁰ While art presentation is not the primary purpose of the Historic New Orleans Collection, they have had great success with the visual arts shows that they have displayed in the past. An examination of Spanish works on paper, and the influence of Spain on the United States and, in particular, the city of New Orleans, exhibited over one hundred objects, many of which had never been shown outside of Spain before.⁶¹ Another show, “Drawn to Life: Al Hirschfeld and the Theater of Tennessee Williams” brought together drawings by Hirschfeld that had been scattered throughout private and public collections across the country with personal objects owned by HNOC that once belonged to Williams himself.⁶²

HNOC finds its success in its smaller, sophisticated atmosphere. Their shows may be extremely limited in size because of their physical lack of display space, but they use this to their advantage by creating specialized shows that capture a specific moment in history. Like the Ogden’s successful niche of being the only museum dedicated to the art of the Southern United States, HNOC manages to bring in interested passersby as well as serious enthusiasts and scholars because it finds a way to work within its parameters.

HNOC has also developed the highly successful “Concerts in the Courtyard” series. The series runs every fall, and includes musical acts performing in the courtyard that is the center of HNOC’s complex of buildings on Royal Street. A monthly concert with a low admission fee that includes complimentary drinks, as well as their scheduling on a Friday night in the French Quarter means that HNOC brings in a fairly sizable crowd for each concert.⁶³ Like the Ogden, HNOC publishes the concert schedule far ahead of time, so people can plan ahead and bring their friends.

The Historic New Orleans Collection maintains its steady position by providing programs and events that engage the public and by maintaining their position as a specialized venue for smaller, refined shows of both visual art and historically significant artifacts.

Chapter Five: Recommendations

I have described thus far the organizational history and structure of the New Orleans Museum of Art, as well as the benefits and concerns related to the organization's ability to further their mission. Based on my experience in NOMA's collections department and the information outlined above under best practices, I present here the recommendations that I feel would help NOMA continue its transition into a more effective arts organizations.

I. Communication Improvement, Internally and Externally

Internally, NOMA needs to continue to provide its employees with technological advances that will make their jobs more easily completed. Particularly when installations and break-downs of exhibitions are taking place, time should not be wasted filling in those pertinent staff members who still haven't "gotten the memo" about the procedures that need to take place. The reliance on other department staff members to help take apart an exhibition because no one saw the email that explained that the for-hire help for break-down was not to be sent home until the end of the day is just one example of how a misuse of information can affect the museum's ability to do its job properly. The distribution of email addresses to all staff was a good first step, but those employees need computer access on a regular basis, or a different method of internal communication will have to be identified.

Externally, NOMA needs to use its web presence more effectively. While the positives of their social media use do exist, as described above, they have room for improvement. Particularly when it comes to their weekly "Where Y'Art" series, NOMA needs to step up its game in the social media sphere. Social media alerts can be easily lost on the public due to the high volume of organizations out there, but the only answer to

that is to create a high volume of information yourself. NOMA has dedicated marketing interns and volunteers, and it would be worth assigning a solid “staff” member to maintain the social media presence of the museum. Posts and information would have to be cleared with the Director of Communications, of course, but then she would be freed up to manage all of her other tasks without the social media alerts falling by the wayside.

II. Rebranding/Refocusing of Museum Presence in New Orleans

NOMA has already been on its way to a slight rebranding throughout its centennial year celebrations and exhibitions. The museum’s presentation of itself has been altered with its more contemporary website and its complex and varying exhibitions over the celebratory year of 2011. NOMA should continue the momentum it has built with the centennial celebrations, and continue to transition under the new director toward a renewed sense of what “the New Orleans Museum of Art” means to locals and visitors alike. Highlighting its upcoming shows in both contemporary art and older art forms could bring new audiences into the museum and help the museum to build lasting and productive relationships with members of the community.

NOMA would benefit from an effort like those described at the Portland Art Museum and the Cleveland Museum of Art. The museum should unveil a renewed web and graphic presence to highlight its ongoing exhibitions and events in a way that ensures potential visitors of its appeal. Susan Taylor has said that creating “an inviting and accessible museum experience” is one of her main objectives; NOMA should successfully present both its contemporary strengths and its important historical holdings in order to intrigue and teach the modern audiences of New Orleans. By keeping the public informed of its intentions as they make changes, the museum will reaffirm that its primary purpose remains serving the city of New Orleans.

III. Donor Base Expansion

Expanding the donor base of an art museum can be difficult, but NOMA has a prime opportunity at this point in its organizational development to work toward a larger and more varied donor base. As described above, being beholden to those few major donors can lead to a one-sided collection that does not leave room for other expansions that may bring in new audiences.

From 2006 through the midway point of 2011, NOMA has been leading a donation campaign as part of its “100 for 100” exhibition, which will open November 13, 2011 as the final exhibition in their centennial year of celebrations.⁶⁴ This campaign has been successful (NOMA brought in 110 new donations rather than the goal of just 100), and NOMA can capitalize on that effort by working with many of the community members here, and other people elsewhere to bring more art to the museum.

The finale of their centennial year celebrations and the appointment of Susan Taylor mark a chance for NOMA to make a small break from the past thirty-five years. The museum must show potential donors and its community that it is committed to maintaining its standing as the most important fine arts museum in the Gulf region, as well as expanding in new directions to make sure that it is able to preserve and present a collection that will appeal to all members of the public as the years move forward. The arrival of the new director helps this effort in two major ways: Taylor brings along her own circle of contacts and methods of finding new donors, and she can work with and encourage the board of trustees toward further expansion, both financially and artistically.

The use of challenge grants could also help NOMA to both increase its revenue and holdings and forge a more dynamic relationship with its community. In order to draw in

more high-level donors, NOMA could propose that the donor promise a “matching gift,” meaning the amount they pledge will only be given to the museum if the museum can raise the same amount from other, individual donors. This proves to the high-level donors that the organization can entice numerous other investors, and it also proves the museum’s commitment to its donor base. Michael Kaiser describes the usefulness of challenge grants due to the fact that you are not only gaining the original gift from the high roller but also, “...[the] gift would be matched by new money, over and above the normal giving of [the] donor base.”⁶⁵

IV. Reprioritization of the Collection

NOMA’s collection successfully represents the intention of all encyclopedic city art museums with its holdings that represent many of the cultures of the world. The museum needs to do a better job of “putting its best face forward,” and displaying more prominently those parts of the collection that are fascinating and popular with visitors, rather than continually focusing on the parts of the collection that do not draw in regular and return visitors.

NOMA must examine the public offerings it has on view now and consider what makes people attend the Ogden, HNOG, and other places for their visual art shows. The museum must present exhibitions that are unique to NOMA only, exhibitions that cannot be seen anywhere else (unless NOMA decides to tour it). The parallels between the many old customs of the city and the ties to the Caribbean and Africa are a place where NOMA could focus a good deal of its renewed attention on its permanent collection. Presenting the vast world cultural holdings of the museum within the context of such a worldly city as New Orleans would appeal to its community more fully and help NOMA to form its own niche of visual arts presentation.

An additional refocus on the contemporary art collection would also serve NOMA's aspirations of being a true leader in the visual arts community of New Orleans again. The success of events like the opening of *Thalassa* and the entirety of the show, "Parallel Universe: Quintron and Miss Pussycat Live at City Park," proves that the crowds of young art lovers will flock to NOMA for cutting edge, contemporary art shows. Thus, the museum's trustees should not be concerned about alienating audience members with new activities. Instead, they should be programming to elevate their audiences and to bring them face to face with works of art that can teach them things about their community and their world.

V. Ticket Pricing Changes

The American Association of Museums reports that there are 17,500 museums in the United States, with an average admission price of \$7.00.⁶⁶ While one third of those 17,500 museums charge no admission at all, that makes NOMA's price of admission at the higher end of "above average cost." While the museum's collection is indeed important and expansive, and the costs of the museum doing business are great, I feel that the potential increase in audience numbers would offset any risk of losing money by lowering their admission price to \$7.00. If NOMA's admission were only \$7.00, it would be less expensive to visit than the Ogden and the added cost of having to travel out to City Park to get to the museum might not put off so many tourists staying downtown.

A review of NOMA's revenue streams shows that the price of admission does not make the museum a terribly large part of their revenue and so the seemingly worrisome idea of lowering the amount of money the organization would make on each ticket sold should not be as extreme. Instead, it should be seen as an opportunity to spread the word about the museum and to encourage greater numbers of new audiences to visit

than ever before. At a time when everyone is struggling for money, the potential – and, it must be said, the marketing potential – of a museum lowering its prices to accommodate the average citizen would be large. NOMA could use a lowering of ticket prices to show the city of New Orleans that it is recommitting itself to being “*Your* New Orleans Museum of Art,” as their website proclaims. Making the museum more accessible to people of all walks of life would only help spread the truth behind that PR statement as NOMA continues to grow over the next 100 years.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

NOMA must continue its progress away from its troubled past. As noted in Dunbar's *The New Orleans Museum of Art: The First Seventy-Five Years*, "chronic underfunding, inadequate staffing, an ever more daunting shortage of space, and acrimonious personality conflicts plagued the museum for years."⁶⁷ NOMA has made many positive changes in the past six years, but they still have far to go to separate themselves from the damage left by those issues. The museum's success in preparing for and running its centennial year of celebrations and exhibitions proves that it is once again a strong and capable arts organization. Moving forward, NOMA's leadership must use the organization's strengths to reiterate its presence as a vital and important piece of the arts community of New Orleans.

Following the end of 2011's centennial year celebrations, and in advance of the first round of exhibitions of 2012, NOMA should make it clear to both the museum staff and the city of New Orleans that it will continue building on the momentum of its centennial year rather than falling back into its old, static patterns. A statement should be made by the board of trustees and reiterated by the director in public statements and action. If a unified vision is presented and communicated properly throughout the ranks of the museum staff, NOMA will be able to continue its positive evolution and remain not only a nationally significant institution but a regional leader in arts and education.

Susan Taylor and the board of trustees should provide a delineated vision for the museum's advancement over the next ten years. NOMA's board should state soundly its intent to provide support for the continued growth and evolution of the museum, in collection, staff, and reach of influence. Taylor and her team of curators should reiterate their intent to challenge the public through their use and presentation of the museum's collection. Statements like these are necessary to

prove to both the public and the staff that NOMA is a unified organization, but they are only truly effective if they are also backed up by substance. Positive steps toward these goals have been taken in the recent past; NOMA's leadership must ensure that positive steps will continue to be made in the years to come.

New donors should be located and encouraged to forge an ongoing relationship with the curators and director to bring different works of art into the permanent collection. The collection that is held now should be experimented with and presented to the public in ways different from traditional norms so that new generations of audiences desire walking through the museum's doors. Communication between the leadership and the staff, and between the institution and the public, must be improved, and NOMA must remind New Orleanians and visitors of its importance and worth in their environment. As the city art museum, NOMA should expand its collection and programming with an eye toward providing their audience with an educational and engaging view of their worlds that may help them to see things more clearly. With strong and clear leadership, vision, and effective management of the collection and staff, NOMA is poised to increase and strengthen its importance in the arts community of New Orleans.

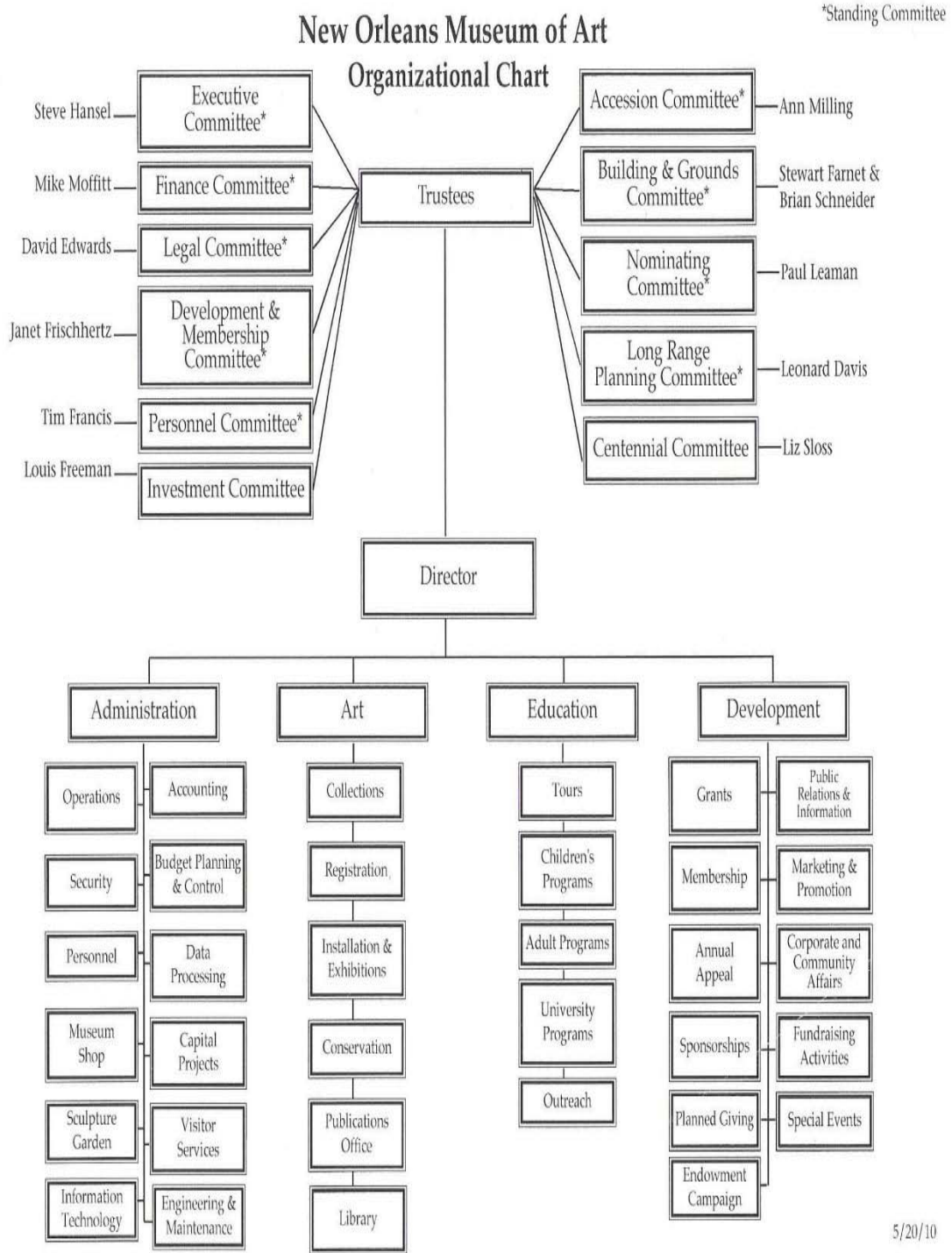
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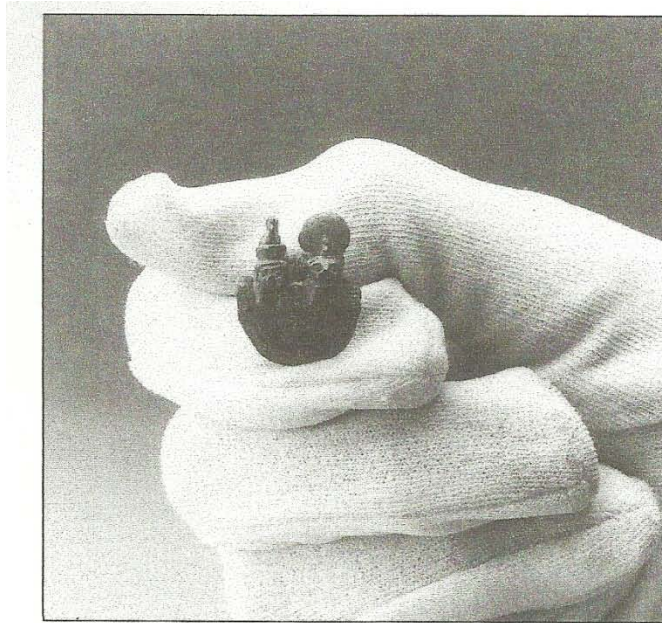
APPENDIX A

The New Orleans Museum of Art, Organizational Chart



APPENDIX B

Painting tiny accession numbers onto objects.
(*The New Museum Registration Methods*, pg. 64)



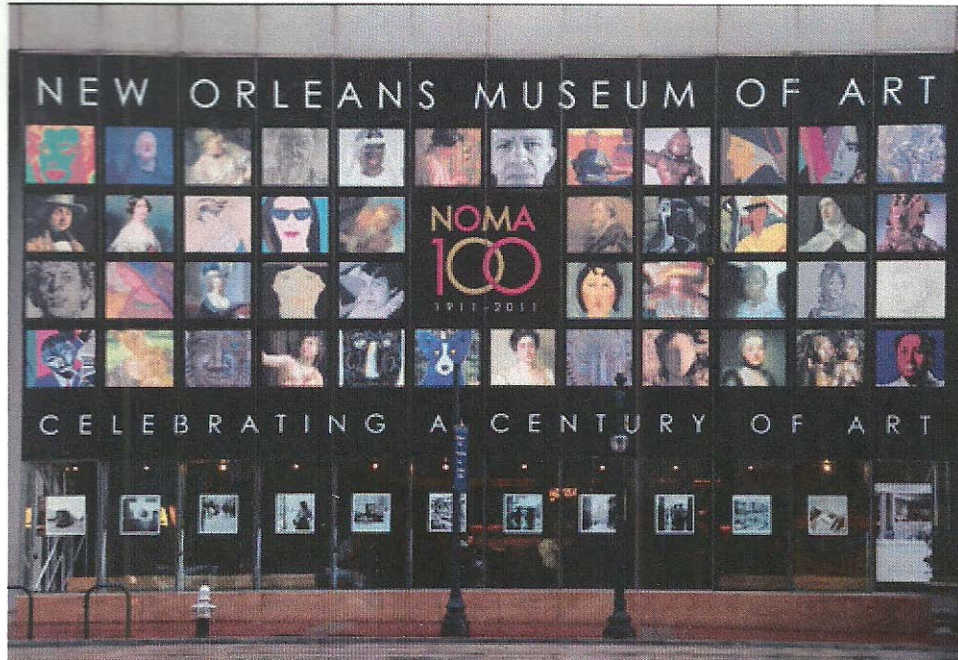
A steady hand is needed to paint small numbers on the reverse of this tiny Egyptian Aegis. Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Photo © 1998 Detroit Institute of Arts.



The number has been marked on the reverse, avoiding any areas of decoration. White numbers have been used on a base coat of clear varnish. Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts. Photo © 1998 Detroit Institute of Arts.

APPENDIX C

NOMA 100th Anniversary Celebration banner hanging on Canal Street.



APPENDIX D

Selection from NOMA's Twitter Page
October 14, 2011



Instagram

 **noma1910**
84 PHOTOS · 117 FOLLOWERS

"Dinner time @cafenoma! Flatbread pizza + glass of wine = \$10. Noms!"

noma1910 is using [Instagram](#) - a fun & quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures. Snap a photo, then choose a filter to transform the look and feel of the shot into a memory to keep around forever.

 Tweet  3  Like

APPENDIX E

Selection from NOMA's Facebook Page October 29, 2011

The screenshot shows the Facebook interface for The New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA). The top navigation bar includes the Facebook logo, a search bar, and the user's name 'Rachel Ford' with a 'Home' link. The page header features the museum's name, a 'Create a Page' button, and a category 'Arts & Entertainment · Museum · New Orleans, Louisiana'. A row of gallery images is displayed below the header. The main content area is titled 'Wall' and shows a post from 'The New Orleans Museum of Art' dated 'Yesterday at 10:36am'. The post text reads: 'NOMA will be open all weekend during Voodoo Fest! But remember, no Where Y'Art tonight, so the museum will be closing at 5 pm.' It has 3 likes and a comment box. Below the post, a photo album titled 'NOMA' is shown, featuring two artworks: a colorful mask and a dark, abstract face. The left sidebar contains navigation links (Wall, Info, Friend Activity, Photos, Events, Videos, Notes, Join My List) and an 'About' section stating the museum was founded in 1910 and opened in 1911. It also displays statistics: 7,105 likes, 241 talking about this, and 1,528 photos. The right sidebar includes a 'You and The New Orleans Museum of Art' section with 25 friends and 1 friend who worked there. Below that are 'Recommendations (7)' and 'Recommended Pages' sections, listing users like Johnny Martin Walters and pages like Harmoniemusik New Orleans and C-Bot Beats.

APPENDIX F

American Association of Museums Code of Ethics for Museums



Code of Ethics for Museums

Introduction

Ethical codes evolve in response to changing conditions, values, and ideas. A professional code of ethics must, therefore, be periodically updated. It must also rest upon widely shared values. Although the operating environment of museums grows more complex each year, the root value for museums, the tie that connects all of us together despite our diversity, is the commitment to serving people, both present and future generations. This value guided the creation of and remains the most fundamental principle in the following *Code of Ethics for Museums*.

Code of Ethics for Museums

Museums make their unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world. Historically, they have owned and used natural objects, living and nonliving, and all manner of human artifacts to advance knowledge and nourish the human spirit. Today, the range of their special interests reflects the scope of human vision. Their missions include collecting and preserving, as well as exhibiting and educating with materials not only owned but also borrowed and fabricated for these ends. Their numbers include both governmental and private museums of anthropology, art history and natural history, aquariums, arboreta, art centers, botanical gardens, children's museums, historic sites, nature centers, planetariums, science and technology centers, and zoos. The museum universe in the United States includes both collecting and noncollecting institutions. Although diverse in their missions, they have in common their nonprofit form of organization and a commitment of service to the public. Their collections and/or the objects they borrow or fabricate are the basis for research, exhibits, and programs that invite public participation.

Taken as a whole, museum collections and exhibition materials represent the world's natural and cultural common wealth. As stewards of that wealth, museums are compelled to advance an understanding of all natural forms and of the human experience. It is incumbent on museums to be resources for humankind and in all their activities to foster an informed appreciation of the rich and diverse world we have inherited. It is also incumbent upon them to preserve that inheritance for posterity.

Museums in the United States are grounded in the tradition of public service. They are organized as public trusts, holding their collections and information as a benefit for those they were established to serve. Members of their governing authority, employees, and volunteers are committed to the interests of these beneficiaries. The law provides the basic framework for museum operations. As nonprofit institutions, museums comply with applicable local, state, and federal laws and international conventions, as well as with the specific legal standards governing trust responsibilities. This *Code of Ethics for Museums* takes that compliance as given. But legal standards are a minimum. Museums and those responsible for them must do more than avoid legal liability, they must take affirmative steps to maintain their integrity so as to warrant public confidence. They must act not only legally but also ethically. This *Code of Ethics for Museums*, therefore, outlines ethical standards that frequently exceed legal minimums.

Loyalty to the mission of the museum and to the public it serves is the essence of museum work, whether volunteer or paid. Where conflicts of interest arise — actual, potential, or perceived — the duty of loyalty must never be compromised. No individual may use his or her position in a museum for personal gain or to benefit another at the expense of the museum, its mission, its reputation, and the society it serves.

For museums, public service is paramount. To affirm that ethic and to elaborate its application to their governance, collections, and programs, the American Association of Museums promulgates this *Code of Ethics for Museums*. In subscribing to this code, museums assume responsibility for the actions of members of their governing authority, employees, and volunteers in the performance of museum-related duties. Museums, thereby, affirm their chartered purpose, ensure the prudent application of their resources, enhance their effectiveness, and maintain public confidence. This collective endeavor strengthens museum work and the contributions of museums to society — present and future.

Governance

Museum governance in its various forms is a public trust responsible for the institution's service to society. The governing authority protects and enhances the museum's collections and programs and its physical, human, and financial resources. It ensures that all these resources support the museum's mission, respond to the pluralism of society, and respect the diversity of the natural and cultural common wealth. Thus, the governing authority ensures that:

- all those who work for or on behalf of a museum understand and support its mission and public trust responsibilities
- its members understand and fulfill their trusteeship and act corporately, not as individuals
- the museum's collections and programs and its physical, human, and financial resources are protected, maintained, and developed in support of the museum's mission
- it is responsive to and represents the interests of society
- it maintains the relationship with staff in which shared roles are recognized and separate responsibilities respected
- working relationships among trustees, employees, and volunteers are based on equity and mutual respect

- professional standards and practices inform and guide museum operations
- policies are articulated and prudent oversight is practiced
- governance promotes the public good rather than individual financial gain.

Collections

The distinctive character of museum ethics derives from the ownership, care, and use of objects, specimens, and living collections representing the world's natural and cultural common wealth. This stewardship of collections entails the highest public trust and carries with it the presumption of rightful ownership, permanence, care, documentation, accessibility, and responsible disposal.

Thus, the museum ensures that:

- collections in its custody support its mission and public trust responsibilities
- collections in its custody are lawfully held, protected, secure, unencumbered, cared for, and preserved
- collections in its custody are accounted for and documented
- access to the collections and related information is permitted and regulated
- acquisition, disposal, and loan activities are conducted in a manner that respects the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources and discourages illicit trade in such materials
- acquisition, disposal, and loan activities conform to its mission and public trust responsibilities
- disposal of collections through sale, trade, or research activities is solely for the advancement of the museum's mission. Proceeds from the sale of nonliving collections are to be used consistent with the established standards of the museum's discipline, but in no event shall they be used for anything other than acquisition or direct care of collections.
- the unique and special nature of human remains and funerary and sacred objects is recognized as the basis of all decisions concerning such collections
- collections-related activities promote the public good rather than individual financial gain
- competing claims of ownership that may be asserted in connection with objects in its custody should be handled openly, seriously, responsively and with respect for the dignity of all parties involved.

Programs

Museums serve society by advancing an understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural common wealth through exhibitions, research, scholarship, publications, and educational activities. These programs further the museum's mission and are responsive to the concerns, interests, and needs of society.

Thus, the museum ensures that:

- programs support its mission and public trust responsibilities
- programs are founded on scholarship and marked by intellectual integrity

- programs are accessible and encourage participation of the widest possible audience consistent with its mission and resources
- programs respect pluralistic values, traditions, and concerns
- revenue-producing activities and activities that involve relationships with external entities are compatible with the museum's mission and support its public trust responsibilities
- programs promote the public good rather than individual financial gain.

Promulgation

This *Code of Ethics for Museums* was adopted by the Board of Directors of the American Association of Museums on November 12, 1993. The AAM Board of Directors recommends that each nonprofit museum member of the American Association of Museums adopt and promulgate its separate code of ethics, applying the *Code of Ethics for Museums* to its own institutional setting.

A Committee on Ethics, nominated by the president of the AAM and confirmed by the Board of Directors, will be charged with two responsibilities:

- establishing programs of information, education, and assistance to guide museums in developing their own codes of ethics
- reviewing the *Code of Ethics for Museums* and periodically recommending refinements and revisions to the Board of Directors.

Afterword

In 1987 the Council of the American Association of Museums determined to revise the association's 1978 statement on ethics. The impetus for revision was recognition throughout the American museum community that the statement needed to be refined and strengthened in light of the expanded role of museums in society and a heightened awareness that the collection, preservation, and interpretation of natural and cultural heritages involve issues of significant concern to the American people.

Following a series of group discussions and commentary by members of the AAM Council, the Accreditation Commission, and museum leaders throughout the country, the president of AAM appointed an Ethics Task Force to prepare a code of ethics. In its work, the Ethics Task Force was committed to codifying the common understanding of ethics in the museum profession and to establishing a framework within which each institution could develop its own code. For guidance, the task force looked to the tradition of museum ethics and drew inspiration from AAM's first code of ethics, published in 1925 as *Code of Ethics for Museum Workers*, which states in its preface:

Museums, in the broadest sense, are institutions which hold their possessions in trust for mankind and for the future welfare of the [human] race. Their value is in direct proportion to the service they render the emotional and intellectual life of the people. The life of a museum worker is essentially one of service. This commitment to service derived from nineteenth-century notions of the advancement and dissemination of knowledge that informed the founding

documents of America's museums. George Brown Goode, a noted zoologist and first head of the United States National Museum, declared in 1889:

The museums of the future in this democratic land should be adapted to the needs of the mechanic, the factory operator, the day laborer, the salesman, and the clerk, as much as to those of the professional man and the man of leisure. . . . In short, the public museum is, first of all, for the benefit of the public.

John Cotton Dana, an early twentieth-century museum leader and director of the Newark Museum, promoted the concept of museum work as public service in essays with titles such as "Increasing the Usefulness of Museums" and "A Museum of Service." Dana believed that museums did not exist solely to gather and preserve collections. For him, they were important centers of enlightenment.

By the 1940s, Theodore Low, a strong proponent of museum education, detected a new concentration in the museum profession on scholarship and methodology. These concerns are reflected in *Museum Ethics*, published by AAM in 1978, which elaborated on relationships among staff, management, and governing authority.

During the 1980s, Americans grew increasingly sensitive to the nation's cultural pluralism, concerned about the global environment, and vigilant regarding the public institutions. Rapid technological change, new public policies relating to nonprofit corporations, a troubled educational system, shifting patterns of private and public wealth, and increased financial pressures all called for a sharper delineation of museums' ethical responsibilities. In 1984 AAM's Commission on Museums for a New Century placed renewed emphasis on public service and education, and in 1986 the code of ethics adopted by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) put service to society at the center of museum responsibilities. ICOM defines museums as institutions "in the service of society and of its development" and holds that "employment by a museum, whether publicly or privately supported, is a public trust involving great responsibility."

Building upon this history, the Ethics Task Force produced several drafts of a Code of Ethics for Museums. These drafts were shared with the AAM Executive Committee and Board of Directors, and twice referred to the field for comment. Hundreds of individuals and representatives of professional organizations and museums of all types and sizes submitted thoughtful critiques. These critiques were instrumental in shaping the document submitted to the AAM Board of Directors, which adopted the code on May 18, 1991. However, despite the review process, when the adopted code was circulated, it soon became clear that the diversity of the museum field prevented immediate consensus on every point.

Therefore, at its November 1991 meeting, the AAM Board of Directors voted to postpone implementation of the Code of Ethics for at least one year. At the same meeting an Ethics Commission nominated by the AAM president was confirmed. The newly appointed commission — in addition to its other charges of establishing educational programs to guide museums in developing their own code of ethics and establishing procedures for addressing alleged violations

of the code — was asked to review the code and recommend to the Board changes in either the code or its implementation.

The new Ethics Commission spent its first year reviewing the code and the hundreds of communications it had generated, and initiating additional dialogue. AAM institutional members were invited to comment further on the issues that were most divisive — the mode of implementation and the restrictions placed on funds from deaccessioned objects. Ethics Commission members also met in person with their colleagues at the annual and regional meetings, and an ad hoc meeting of museum directors was convened by the board president to examine the code's language regarding deaccessioning.

This process of review produced two alternatives for the board to consider at its May meeting: (1) to accept a new code developed by the Ethics Commission, or (2) to rewrite the sections of the 1991 code relating to use of funds from deaccessioning and mode of implementation. Following a very lively and involved discussion, the motion to reinstate the 1991 code with modified language was passed and a small committee met separately to make the necessary changes.

In addition, it was voted that the Ethics Commission be renamed the Committee on Ethics with responsibilities for establishing information and educational programs and reviewing the Code of Ethics for Museums and making periodic recommendations for revisions to the board. These final changes were approved by the board in November 1993 and are incorporated into this document, which is the *AAM Code of Ethics for Museums*.

Each nonprofit museum member of the American Association of Museums should subscribe to the *AAM Code of Ethics for Museums*. Subsequently, these museums should set about framing their own institutional codes of ethics, which should be in conformance with the AAM code and should expand on it through the elaboration of specific practices. This recommendation is made to these member institutions in the belief that engaging the governing authority, staff, and volunteers in applying the AAM code to institutional settings will stimulate the development and maintenance of sound policies and procedures necessary to understanding and ensuring ethical behavior by institutions and by all who work for them or on their behalf.

With these steps, the American museum community expands its continuing effort to advance museum work through self-regulation. The *Code of Ethics for Museums* serves the interests of museums, their constituencies, and society. The primary goal of AAM is to encourage institutions to regulate the ethical behavior of members of their governing authority, employees, and volunteers. Formal adoption of an institutional code promotes higher and more consistent ethical standards. To this end, the Committee on Ethics will develop workshops, model codes, and publications. These and other forms of technical assistance will stimulate a dialogue about ethics throughout the museum community and provide guidance to museums in developing their institutional codes.

APPENDIX G

American Association of Museums Accreditation Commission's Expectations Regarding Collections Stewardship



The Accreditation Commission's Expectations Regarding Collections Stewardship

Approved December 17, 2004¹
Effective January 1, 2005

The Accreditation Commission's expectations reflect the evolving nature of standards and practices in museums. During its review of over 100 institutions a year, the Commission discusses how current practices in museums relate to the existing eligibility criteria and Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum. These Expectations support and elaborate on the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum. Periodically, after thorough deliberation, the Commission revises its expectations to stay current with evolving standards. The Commission focuses on presenting desired outcomes, rather than on prescribing methods by which these outcomes must be achieved.

Why does the Commission consider collections stewardship important?

Stewardship is the careful, sound, and responsible management of that which is entrusted to a museum's care. Possession of **collections**² incurs legal, social, and ethical obligations to provide proper physical storage, management, and care for the collections and associated documentation, as well as proper intellectual control. Collections are held in trust for the public and made accessible for the public's benefit. Effective collections stewardship ensures that the **objects** the museum owns, borrows, holds in its custody, and/or uses are available and accessible to present and future generations. A museum's collections are an important means of advancing its mission and serving the public.

What are the Accreditation Commission's expectations regarding collections stewardship?

Per Program Eligibility Criteria:

- ⊕ An accredited museum, either collecting or non-collecting, is required to have a formal and appropriate program of documentation, **care**, and use of collections.

- ⊕ An institution that owns collections (including living organisms), whether actively collecting or not, is required to have **accessioned** at least 80 percent of its permanent collections.

Per the Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum, an accreditable museum must demonstrate that it:

- ⊕ owns, exhibits, or uses collections that are appropriate to its mission
- ⊕ legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections
- ⊕ conducts collections-related research according to appropriate scholarly standards
- ⊕ strategically plans for the use and development of its collections
- ⊕ guided by its mission, provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation
- ⊕ allocates its space and uses its facilities to meet the needs of the collections, audience, and staff
- ⊕ has appropriate measures in place to ensure the safety and security of people, its collections and/or objects, and the facilities it owns or uses
- ⊕ takes appropriate measures to protect itself against potential risk and loss

The Commission also expects an institution to:

- ⊕ plan strategically and act ethically with respect to collections stewardship matters
- ⊕ legally, ethically, and responsibly acquire, manage, and dispose of collection items as well as know what collections are in its ownership/custody, where they came from, why it has them, and their current condition and location
- ⊕ provide regular and reasonable access to, and use of, the collections/objects in its custody

This requires thorough understanding of collections stewardship issues to ensure thoughtful and responsible planning and decision-making. With this in mind, the Commission emphasizes systematic development and regular review of policies, procedures, practices, and plans for the goals, activities, and needs of the collections.

How does the Commission assess whether the institution's collections and/or objects are appropriate for its mission?

The Commission compares the institution's mission—how it formally defines its unique identity and purpose, and its understanding of its role and responsibility to the public—to two things:

- ⊕ the collections used by the institution, and
- ⊕ its policies, procedures, and practices regarding the development and use of collections

(See also the *Accreditation Commission's Expectations Regarding Institutional Mission Statements*.) Accreditation Commission's Expectations Regarding Collections Stewardship
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In its review, the Commission examines whether:

- ⊕ the mission statement or collections documents (e.g., collections management policy, collections plan, etc.) are clear enough to guide collections stewardship decisions
- ⊕ the collections owned by the museum, and objects loaned and exhibited at the museum, fall within the scope of the stated mission and collections documents.
- ⊕ the mission and other collections stewardship related documents are in alignment and guide the museum's practices.

How does the Commission assess whether the institution effectively manages, documents, and cares for its collections and/or objects?

The Commission recognizes that:

- ⊕ there are different ways to manage, house, secure, document, and conserve collections, depending on their media and use, the museum's own discipline, size, physical facilities, geographic location, and financial and human resources. Therefore, the Commission considers many facets of an institution's operations that taken together, demonstrate the effectiveness of its collections stewardship policies, procedures, and practices. The Commission considers the museum's collections stewardship policies, procedures, and practices in light of these varying factors.
- ⊕ museums may have diverse types of collections categorized by different levels of purpose and use—permanent, educational, archival, research, study, to name a few—that may have different management and care needs. The Commission expects these distinctions to be articulated in collections stewardship-related policies and procedures.
- ⊕ different museum disciplines may have different collections stewardship practices, issues, and needs related to their specific field. The Commission expects museums to follow the standards and best practices appropriate to their respective discipline and/or museum type as applicable.

In its review, the Commission expects that:

- ⊕ a current, approved, comprehensive **collections management policy** is in effect and actively used to guide the museum's stewardship of its collections
- ⊕ 80 percent of the permanent collection is formally accessioned and an appropriate and reasonable percentage of the permanent collection is cataloged, inventoried, and visually documented
- ⊕ the human resources are sufficient, and the staff have the appropriate education, training, and experience, to fulfill the museum's stewardship responsibilities and the needs of the collections
- ⊕ staff are delegated responsibility to carry out the collections management policy
- ⊕ a system of documentation, records management, and inventory is in effect to describe each object and its acquisition (permanent or temporary), current condition and location, and movement into, out of, and within the museum
- ⊕ the museum regularly monitors environmental conditions and takes pro-active measures to mitigate the effects of ultraviolet light, fluctuations in temperature and humidity, air pollution, damage, pests, and natural disasters on collections
- ⊕ an appropriate method for identifying needs and determining priorities for conservation/care is in place

- ⊕ safety and security procedures and plans for collections in the museum's custody are documented, practiced, and addressed in the museum's emergency/disaster preparedness plan
- ⊕ regular assessment of, and planning for, collection needs (development, conservation, risk management, etc.) takes place and sufficient financial and human resources are allocated for collections stewardship
- ⊕ collections care policies and procedures for collections on exhibition, in storage, on loan, and during travel are appropriate, adequate, and documented
- ⊕ the scope of a museum's collections stewardship extends to both the physical and intellectual control of its property
- ⊕ ethical considerations of collections stewardship are incorporated into the appropriate museum policies and procedures
- ⊕ considerations regarding future collecting activities are incorporated into institutional plans and other appropriate policy documents

The Commission also reviews the following documents required to be submitted as part of the accreditation process:

- ⊕ Repository agreement for objects in custody without title (required for some museums)
- ⊕ Visual images that illustrate the scope of the museum's collections
- ⊕ Collections management policy and loan policies (custodial care and borrowing policies for museums that do not own or manage collections, but borrow and use collections for exhibits, education, or research)
- ⊕ Sample copy of completed collections documentation record(s) (with accession, catalog, and inventory information)
- ⊕ If the museum is authorized to deaccession, a copy of a deaccession form or other written documentation used for deaccessioning purposes (a completed form if applicable, otherwise a blank form)
- ⊕ Sample copy of a completed outgoing loan agreement
- ⊕ Sample copy of a completed incoming loan agreement
- ⊕ Sample copy of completed condition report form
- ⊕ Emergency/disaster preparedness plan (covering staff, visitors, and collections)

In addition, the following documents are not required but should be provided if available:

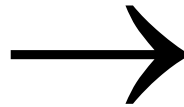
- ⊕ **Collections plan**
- ⊕ Conservation plan
- ⊕ Completed RC-AAM ***Standard Facility Report***

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APPENDIX H

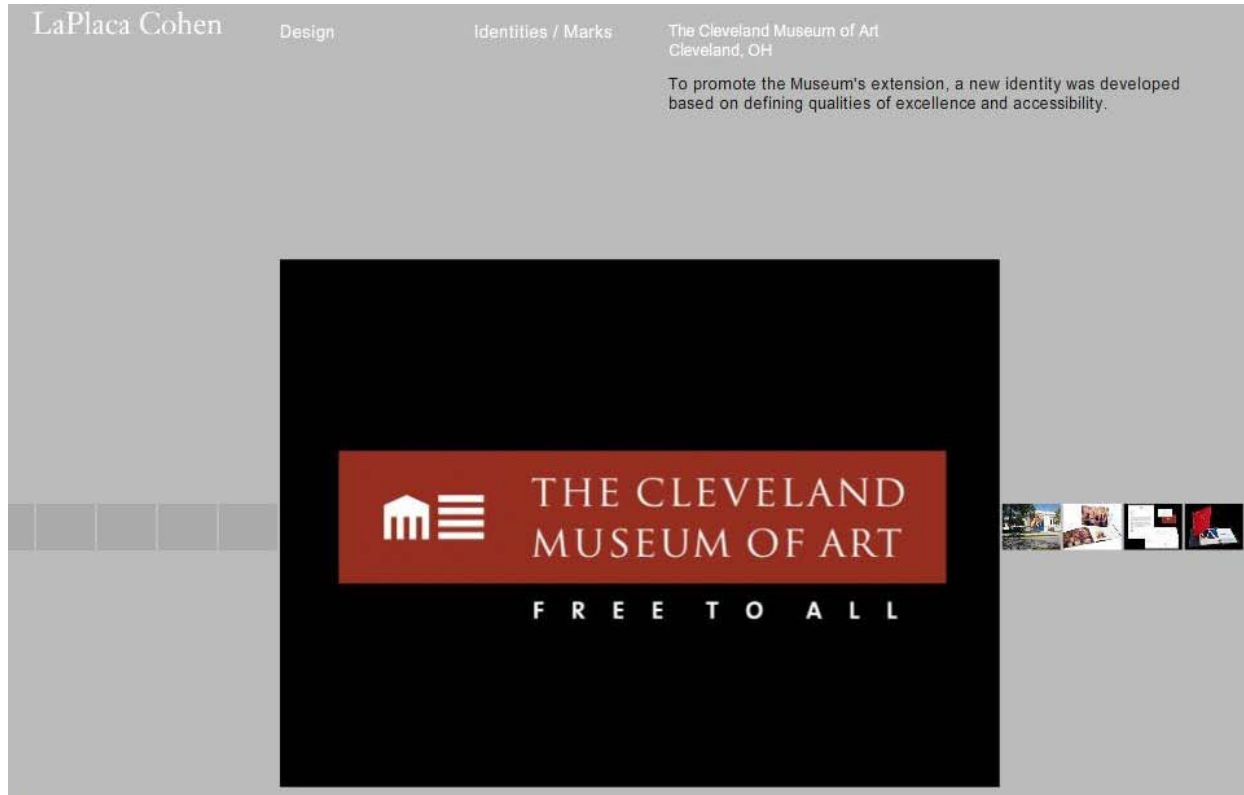
Portland Art Museum Logo
Past (left) and Current (right)

PORT
LAND
MUSEUM



Appendix I

Revised Logo for the Cleveland Museum of Art by LaPlaca Cohen, 2005



Appendix J

New York Times article about Ersy & Josephine Sacabo exhibition
at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art

The New York Times

September 28, 2011

Life and Art, Side by Side in the French Quarter

By PENELOPE GREEN

NEW ORLEANS

ERSY SCHWARTZ, a sculptor, and Josephine Sacabo, a photographer, are old friends, neighbors and artistic collaborators who live in the crumbling village known as the French Quarter, in houses that are exemplars of a certain local aesthetic composed of equal parts grandeur and mystery, funk and rot. They are also fomenters of the sort of time-traveling artwork that comes with a distinctly New Orleans point of view.

In Ms. Schwartz's meticulous, mischievous pieces — which might be peopled with tiny winged figures that have bird skulls in place of heads or real mice cast in bronze — and in Ms. Sacabo's ghostly, smoky female figures, you can see the collision of magic realism, allegory and surrealism. It's a territory of fallen angels, omnivorous ancestors and all manner of fantastic creatures.

The two artists are the subject of side-by-side retrospectives, "Ersy: Architect of Dreams" and "Óyeme con los Ojos (Hear Me With Your Eyes)," opening here Saturday at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art.

This is significant not just because it's a celebration of two local heroes. (Although devotees of Ms. Schwartz, a shy, gruff woman who is clearly allergic to self-marketing, will find it satisfying to see four decades' worth of her work in one place for the first time.) It is also an intermezzo in the drama of real life, which has dealt some blows to both women in the last decade, a period that has not been easy for anyone in this town.

As Kyle Roberts, Ms. Schwartz's partner, said, it signifies a moment "when we can all exhale."

"Sorry about the dust," Ms. Schwartz was saying early last week, as she handed over a photograph of her grandmother decked out as Queen of Comus (that's high up in the caste society of New Orleans, as it plays out in Mardi Gras krewes).

This reporter added it to a little pile of objects she had accumulated on the red velvet and rosewood sofa, part of a suite of furniture that in all likelihood had occupied the same spot in Ms. Schwartz's front parlor since 1925, when her grandmother bought the place, which was built in the mid-19th century as a billiard house, an extension to the gaming club next door.

There was also one of Ms. Schwartz's cast-bronze mice, in a horizontal arabesque pose, and a painted metal parakeet, a prop in a practical joke her father liked to play on her, which involved hiding her real parakeet and replacing it with this tinny simulacrum.

"I had a very odd childhood," said Ms. Schwartz, 60, whose family moved into the house when she was 10. Indeed, her father, an avid hunter who ran a wholesale hardware company, liked to use his only daughter as target practice, shooting her with his BB gun as she ran back and forth on the front lawn.

"It didn't hurt," she said unconvincingly.

Ms. Schwartz's childhood was also marked by tragedies, including the early deaths of several family members. In a city where you expect a gothic family history, Ms. Schwartz's stands out.

"If my work seems a little grim, it is," she said.

At Cooper Union, in Manhattan, where she taught for 20 years, Ms. Schwartz would harvest the mice that sanitation workers flushed out from under the statue of Peter Cooper. She cast them in bronze and tucked them into pieces like a cheese grater fitted out on the inside with spiky teeth and tufted red velvet — a luxurious, toothy coffin. (After Hurricane Katrina, Ms. Schwartz mourned the contents of her freezer here, when she lost a shark, part of a deer, some lovebirds, frogs, a snake and a lizard.)

She returned to this city, and this house, 12 years ago, when her mother was no longer able to live alone (Ms. Schwartz's father died in 1982). "I loved my mother," she said, describing a fiery human-rights activist and preservationist who used to throw herself in front of the tour buses rattling the foundations of the houses in the French Quarter. "And I loved the house, so there was really no choice."

That was when she resumed a friendship begun decades earlier with Ms. Sacabo. (The two met when Ms. Sacabo was assigned by a local magazine to take a photo of Ms. Schwartz. "It was love at first sight," said Ms. Sacabo, who is as outgoing as Ms. Schwartz is taciturn.) As it happened, Ms. Sacabo had just moved into a 170-year-old merchant's house around the corner with her husband, Dalt Wonk.

For the record, no one in this article uses his or her given name. Ersy was christened Eugenie, after her mother, and her partner, Ms. Roberts, a photographer, was named Louise. Ms. Sacabo was born Mary Alice Martin in Laredo, Tex., and Mr. Wonk, Richard Cohen, in Passaic, N.J.

When they were young theater students at Bard, Ms. Sacabo and Mr. Wonk (she calls him Wonkie) decided they needed stage names, and after a while the names stuck. Dalt Wonk is a

play on “Don’t Walk,” but Mr. Wonk, a playwright and theater critic, said these days he tells people it’s Romanian Jewish.

“I got sick of telling the story,” he said. “And anyway, I didn’t want people to think I didn’t want to be Jewish.” (Mr. Wonk, 69, is also the author and illustrator of books of fables with a jaundiced worldview. “Experience teaches nothing until it is too late” reads the epigraph of one he dedicated to Ms. Schwartz’s mother, who died in 2001.)

MS. Sacabo, 60, was raised Catholic, in a formal Latin family that was not overly thrilled by her choice of a husband. Her father never really forgave her, she said, for marrying “outside of my milieu.” When he died, her mother bought her the merchant’s house as a kind of peace offering. Since the 1970s, Ms. Sacabo and her husband had been living in an atmospheric rental nearby, after a decade in the south of France, where they’d had a theater company.

Their new house had been owned by a reclusive architect who was a hoarder. He had covered the windows in black plastic, to save on air-conditioning, and was camping in two rooms. The rest of the house was stuffed with birdcages of his own design, brass chandeliers, wooden shutters, old doors, kitchen cabinets, vacuum cleaners, spiral staircases, curious iron grillwork boxes and fire irons, to name a few of his obsessions. When he died, his family sold the house for about \$380,000, contents included.

“That was the condition,” Ms. Sacabo said. “That we clear all the junk out. But for people like us, it was like some serious flea market.”

She and Mr. Wonk and Ms. Schwartz made the house habitable, laying in new plumbing and wiring, and plastering and painting. Shutters became closet doors; the weird iron boxes are now planters.

“We were broke, Ersy was broke, dah dah dah,” Ms. Sacabo said cheerfully. A cattle inheritance back in Laredo was a windfall that paid for the kitchen, though its cabinets she found in the former owner’s stash upstairs.

Ms. Schwartz built the grand floor-to-ceiling bookshelves in the living room and the sinuous spiral staircase, with help from her Cooper Union students. They painted the living room four times, under Ms. Sacabo’s precise direction. It looks like a cloudy sky, and now that the paint has peeled, exposing the crumbly, water-stained plaster, it has that distinct New Orleans patina. As in Venice, decay is a design element here.

“Ersy said it looks like someone under ether,” Ms. Sacabo said. “She’d say, ‘Sacabo, if you make me paint this one more time. ...’ But it had to be just right.”

Jon Newlin, an author of “Geopsychic Wonders of New Orleans,” said that like so many New Orleans artists: “Josephine and Ersy are sui generis. Josephine is sort of guided by her literary enthusiasms, and Ersy is completely instinctual. I think everything comes out of that deranged head of hers. The connective tissue? They are both eccentrics in their art.”

D. Eric Bookhardt, Mr. Newlin's co-author and a longtime art reviewer for *Gambit*, the city's alternative weekly newspaper, noted that each artist's habitat is tangled up in her work.

"Josephine's influences are the French Symbolist poets," he said. "But being a Latina, she has that sort of magic realist DNA in her blood." Like Keith Carter and Debbie Fleming Caffery, Ms. Sacabo is representative of a group of Southern Gulf Coast photographers who have their antecedents in the work of Clarence John Laughlin and E. J. Bellocq, the Storyville documentarian who inspired Louis Malle's "Pretty Baby."

The artwork of both women "reflects this sort of transmutation of humanistic values into these, hmm, symbolic creatures," as Mr. Bookhardt put it, and "that all relates to the environment they live in. Because what I would designate as the New Orleans *modus operandi* for interior décor is surrounding oneself with talismanic objects that create a certain aesthetic."

"Small things take on a certain charge that somehow communicates," he added, "even if you don't know what they mean to the owner."

And if these two houses are "tropical magical realist" environments, as Mr. Bookhardt would say, they are merely emblematic of the sort of rotting grandeur, the embrace of the inevitability of decay, that pervades the city.

Time, Mr. Bookhardt continued, warming to his theme, "is really the design element here. It's a palette, a creative pool and expression."

Peeling paint, family photographs thick with dust and decomposing on a mantel, pockmarked plaster walls: these represent existential truths, *memento mori*. And who can be bothered, or has the money, for upkeep? Better to make a friend of decay.

"It keeps you in touch with the organic unity of life," Mr. Bookhardt said. "It's going to happen to us all one day."

THE year before Katrina, Mr. Wonk had a mysterious seizure, and surgeons removed a piece of his brain. It was Ms. Schwartz who met Ms. Sacabo and their daughter, Iris, at the airport (they had been in New York for a show of Ms. Sacabo's photographs) and let them know he had made it through the night. It would be three months before Mr. Wonk left the hospital. When he did, Ms. Schwartz made him a piece of art: a little bronze Icarus figure caught in a goblet.

Two years earlier, she had finished a significant work, called "Homage to the Society of Ste. Anne." A darkly comic piece with 105 precisely rendered bronze figures, tiny mythic creatures — a headless pig, a cowboy boot, a bird — striding across a table at eye level, it conjures up the real Ste. Anne's parade, which was started in 1974 by three local characters, Henri Schindler, Paul Poche and Mr. Newlin, and took on a funerary quality during the worst years of the AIDS epidemic, when marchers would carry the ashes of friends and tip them into the Mississippi.

The piece was also a tribute to Ms. Schwartz's mother, some of whose ashes Ms. Schwartz poured into the river that year at the parade. The rest are buried in the garden out front, under a camellia bush, next to those of her aunt and her grandmother.

As in most New Orleans houses, the dead are everywhere. Ms. Schwartz's cousin, Jack McIlhenney, is in the front parlor, in a wooden box. Most of the ashes of Jimmy Vial, a friend who died of AIDS in the mid-1990s, are in the Pacific Ocean, in a piece Ms. Schwartz made to look like a metronome, but some were stuffed into capsules and laid on the seat of another artwork, a miniature wheelchair inside a pyramid. That sculpture is at the Ogden this week, but not the capsules: "They're in the house somewhere," Ms. Schwartz said.

Like Ms. Schwartz herself, who battled lung cancer a year and a half ago ("Yes, and I'm still smoking," she'll say, brandishing an unfiltered Camel), her house is standing through sheer force of will, and, perhaps, the will of the ghosts collected there.

"It's a beautiful house," said Ms. Roberts, 53. "But its needs are insatiable."

When Ms. Roberts left town the day before Katrina, she said, "I was really convinced Ersy was going to come with me. But no, the house always wins."

As Ms. Schwartz said, "The house is an illness with me." She stayed on for a week, post-Katrina, entertaining several guests. They bathed in the fountain.

In 2008, Ms. Roberts bought the "Hommage" piece and donated it to the Ogden, which gave the museum's curator at the time the idea to collect Ms. Schwartz's work in a major retrospective, and pair it with Ms. Sacabo's.

"When things were really ugly," Ms. Sacabo said, "when Ersy was in the hospital, I'd say, 'Come on, we're doing this show.' It was like an incentive."

"You know, there is no art manifesto between us," she continued. "It's not this surrealist dah dah dah. That's irrelevant. What connects us is a more sustaining feeling, this life of going back and forth, this emotional support."

She added: "It's more a life-experience sort of connection, rather than Ersy's surrealist bird heads and my eyeballs. The point is that we are friends."

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