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## The New Orleans Museum of Art: Connecting a Cultural Legacy to the Community through Interpretation and Audience Engagement

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The New Orleans Museum of Art: Connecting a Cultural Legacy to the  
Community through Interpretation and Audience Engagement

An Internship Report

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of New Orleans in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts  
In Arts Administration

by

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B.A. Art History Louisiana State University, 2009

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## ABSTRACT

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The following report is the result of an internship with the oldest fine art institute in the city of New Orleans. I had the opportunity to work at the New Orleans Museum of Art within the Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement. Over the course of this internship, I observed the staff of this prolific organization create and facilitate educational experiences and public programming relating to special exhibitions and the permanent collection while appealing to all ages and supporting the Museum's mission. This report seeks to summarize the history of the institution, outline particular programs, and to define the importance of interpretation and audience engagement within visual arts organizations. It concludes with recommendations deduced from best practices aimed to strengthen the connection between the community and this cultural legacy through interpretation and audience engagement.

## INTRODUCTION

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The New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA) will be the focus of this report which is the result and culmination of my time interning within the organization. The following sections will outline the development and history of the organization, my experience as a graduate student working within the institution, programs implemented by the Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement, SWOT analysis, and best practices with accompanying recommendations. This report seeks to define the importance of interpretation and audience engagement within visual arts institutions. It is hoped that the information put forth will incite thought leading towards the continuation of quality and the betterment of the New Orleans Museum of Art and its connection to the community.

## **SECTION I: OVERVIEW OF THE NEW ORLEANS MUSEUM OF ART**

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Over 100 years of history stands strong within the walls of the New Orleans Museum of Art and its grandeur—the walls in which cultures are translated through vessels created by old masters and contemporary history makers. To comprehensively cover the past to the present of this institution in detail may not be suitable in this report; hence, the following will highlight aspects of the Museum’s development and history, collection, administrative structure, and overall mission. The combination of these elements has made the New Orleans Museum of Art the prolific art institution it is today.

### **DEVELOPMENT**

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The culturally rich history of the oldest fine art institute of New Orleans, Louisiana, began in 1910. To set the stage, the city in the early 1900s was flourishing through various opportunities, many as a result of its natural resources. New Orleans was the third busiest seaport in the United States, producing fortunes via the industries of shipping, finance, and agriculture. During this time, the city experienced exponential growth and began to evolve with the development of neighborhoods and universities. As this progress continued, it advanced New Orleans into one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the nation, captivating individuals with its rich culture, history, and opportunities. In February of 1910, a proposition, which seemed only fitting amongst the city’s recent augmentations, was initiated that could enhance the charm of New Orleans. A local businessman, Isaac Delgado, proposed a temple of art for rich and poor alike accompanied by an offer of \$150,000 to the City Park Commission.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E. John Bullard ed., *The New Orleans Museum of Art: Handbook of the Collection*, History of the Collection, by Prescott Dunbar (New Orleans: The New Orleans Museum of Art, 1995), 7.

Though philanthropic, Isaac Delgado was not known as a patron of the arts prior to his donation. The exact motivations for his proposal and subsequent monetary backing remain elusive, but this seems to have been a selfless act of a man with the financial means. He was born in 1839 in Jamaica and emigrated from his place of birth to New Orleans at the age of fourteen.<sup>2</sup> He built his fortune as a sugar broker after joining the business founded by his uncle, Samuel Delgado.

As for the land on which the Museum was to be built, Delgado consulted his friend, adviser, and fellow sugar broker Pierre A. Lelong, who shared a very similar story of emigration and success in the city. He was a member of the City Park Board of Commissioners and played an integral role in securing the bequest of Delgado and the land approval of The Commissioner of the City Park Improvement Association. Thus, the City Park Board named the avenue that would lead to the Museum from City Park's main entrance after this distinguished man.<sup>3</sup> Lelong Avenue would be marked a few years later by the erection of General P. G. T. Beauregard's statue as it remains today.

A national competition was publicized for the design of the building. The competition yielded a plan for a dominant noteworthy building submitted by a young architect from Chicago, Samuel Marx. To complement the setting, Marx incorporated Greek styles with a subtropical appearance.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the avenue laced with trees and amongst a luscious environment featuring lagoons, the foundation was laid for the quintessential modern temple that would incorporate the character of the city with the sole intent of housing quality art.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> John Smith Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1922) <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=w-YxAQAAMAAJ>, 3:381.

<sup>4</sup>Dunbar, *History of the Collection*, 7.

The Isaac Delgado Museum officially opened to the public on December 16, 1911. It was the third institution of its kind in the South.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the philanthropic founder was unable to attend due to illness. Isaac Delgado passed away in his Garden District home on January 4, 1912. It was a great loss for a city that had gained so much from this particular patron.

Before his passing, Delgado did not provide funds for the maintenance of the Museum or for acquisitions. The City of New Orleans was called upon to provide an annual appropriation for the operating budget, and the exhibition program was sponsored by local art organizations.<sup>6</sup> The Isaac Delgado Museum relied on the generosity of individuals and collectors to develop a permanent collection. During the following years, it was evident that the Museum building would have to expand to accommodate its budding collection. In 1971, three additions opened that tripled the size of the original Delgado Museum. The additions included the Wisner Education Wing, the Stern Auditorium, and the City Wing, which provided space appropriate for displaying the permanent collection as well as special exhibitions. Furthermore, the trustees voted to change the art institution's name from the Isaac Delgado Museum to the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA) in an effort to acknowledge the support from the city and its citizens, thereby giving the community a sense of ownership.

The Museum would undergo several expansions in the following decades. In 1993, the completion of work costing twenty-three million dollars was celebrated. This physical expansion along with mounting acquisitions established NOMA amongst the top twenty-five percent of the nation's largest and most significant fine art institutions.<sup>7</sup> The next noteworthy multi-million dollar enhancement would begin in 2000 with the authorization of a campaign to fund the Sculpture Garden.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "About: 100 Years," The New Orleans Museum of Art, <http://noma.org/>.

Located adjacent to the New Orleans Museum of Art in City Park, the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden is currently home to sixty-three sculptures set in a manicured landscape with winding paths, occupying approximately five acres. The sculptures are situated amongst pines, magnolias, and live oaks draped with Spanish moss in such a manner that seems as though they sprouted with the natural vegetation.

Sydney and Walda Besthoff have not only been dynamic business leaders but also active cultural advocates in the city of New Orleans for decades. Both are dedicated to the advancement of the arts. In 1978, they established the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Foundation which is committed to conjuring and promoting public interest in the arts, particularly contemporary sculpture. A vast number of the sculptures on display were donated to the NOMA by the Foundation.<sup>8</sup>

The Besthoff Sculpture Garden opened to the public in November of 2003 and has provided a unique space for public programs and other activities hosted by the Museum. In addition to the exceptional environment the garden provides, it has enhanced the existing dynamic permanent collection possessed by the New Orleans Museum of Art.

## **COLLECTION**

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When the New Orleans Museum of Art opened on December 16, 1911, it was with nine works of art.<sup>9</sup> Luckily, prior to World War I, enthusiasm for the Museum in the community attracted several art collectors who donated works that served as the foundation for the permanent collection.<sup>10</sup> These donations included works by Louisiana artists, Chinese jades,

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<sup>8</sup> “About: The Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden,” The New Orleans Museum of Art, <http://noma.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> “About: Welcome,” The New Orleans Museum of Art, <http://noma.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> Dunbar, History of the Collection, 8.

American and European silver, Greek vases and ancient glass, and works by various Nineteenth Century artists of the French Salon, the Barbizon School, and the Munich Group.

No significant acquisitions were made in the 1920s. However, the 1930s saw the donation of three important works by Italian old masters from New York collector and philanthropist Samuel H. Kress. This was the beginning of what would become a vital relationship between the Museum and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

With the exception of the major purchase of French Rococo artist Charles-Joseph Natoire's *Toilette of Psyche*, the growth of the collection was once again static during World War II, but the Museum did not cease to exhibit exhilarating works of art. In 1940, *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*, organized by New York's Museum of Modern Art, was exhibited and included Picasso's work *Guernica*. In addition, NOMA was the first American museum to exhibit the works of Hans Hoffman which was arranged by one of his students, New Orleans native Fritz Bultman.

It was not until the 1950s that the Museum began to experience an increase in donations and major purchases to fill out the collection while continuing to make history with noteworthy exhibitions. In 1953, an exhibit of masterpieces from the Louvre, *French Painting Through Five Centuries, 1400-1900*, made its way to the galleries of the Museum.

In the 1970s, NOMA's photography collection began to develop. It was also in that decade that the Museum attracted the *Treasures of Tutankhamun*. This large-scale exhibition made its way to the New Orleans Museum of Art in 1977, an opportunity that was made possible due to the Museum's expanded physical size. Other museums in the region, such as the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, did not have the capacity at that time to house an exhibition

of its size and suitably accommodate the many visitors that this exhibition would attract.<sup>11</sup>

NOMA's large capacity has since, more than once, allowed it to be the top selection amongst competition for choice exhibitions.

The accomplishment of major acquisitions and exhibitions continued in the Eighties and Nineties. In 1985, the Museum purchased Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun's *Portrait of Marie Antoinette* for its 75th anniversary. It is now one of the iconic pieces in the collection. About ten years later, NOMA hosted a major national Fabergé exhibition: *Fabergé in America*. In contrast to that exhibition, in 2009, the Walt Disney Studio underwrote *Dreams Come True: Art of the Classic Fairy Tales from the Walt Disney Studio*. NOMA was the only venue for this exhibition in the United States.<sup>12</sup> Two years later, the New Orleans Museum of Art celebrated its centennial year with exhibitions that highlighted NOMA's capacious permanent collection. The festivities lasted thirty-one hours and were free and open to the public accenting the fulfillment of Delgado's vision from a hundred years prior.

## **POST-KATRINA**

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It seems virtually impossible to reside in the city of New Orleans and not hear something regarding *before the storm* or *after the storm* at least once a week. Tragedy is internalized which makes us who we are and has the potential to bond a community. The people of the city have been through a horrific ordeal and have remained strong with their culture intact. It is for that reason the effects of Hurricane Katrina should be mentioned when discussing the history of any cultural institution in the city of New Orleans. Like the people of the city, the New Orleans Museum of Art has come back stronger and with its cultural identity preserved.

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<sup>11</sup> Catherine Fox, "In Memoriam: Gudmund Vigtel took High Museum from Provincial Shadows to Global Recognition," *Arts Atl*, October 22, 2012, <http://www.artsatl.com/2012/10/memoriam-gudmund/>.

<sup>12</sup> "About: 100 Years."

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina closed NOMA. Fortunately, there was no damage to the collection although the same cannot be said of the building, the Besthoff Sculpture Garden, and the number of staff members employed while the Museum and the city recovered. The following year, the Museum closed for seven months. Important works from the permanent collection were included in exhibitions that travelled the country in an effort to raise money for hurricane recovery. In 2007, the exhibition *Femme, Femme, Femme: Paintings of Women in French Society from Daumier to Picasso from the Museums of France* comprised of eighty-five works assembled from forty-five institutions was sent from France as a symbol of support after the disaster.

The Museum closed again in 2010, this time for eight months, to complete a comprehensive restoration of damage inflicted by Hurricane Katrina. It was also in that year that the Besthoff Sculpture Garden re-opened and a leadership era came to an end. After nearly thirty-eight years of service, E. John Bullard retired as the Museum's director. After a nationwide search, Susan Taylor was selected as NOMA's sixth director and is charged with maintaining the mission, reenergizing the Museum, and bringing a fresh identity of NOMA to the general public.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE**

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The New Orleans Museum of Art is a non-profit organization. Through recent restructuring, NOMA currently has four divisions in which various departments are organized.<sup>13</sup> Each division is headed by a deputy director that reports directly to the Executive Director, Susan Taylor. The divisions are: Curatorial Affairs, Interpretation and Audience Engagement, Development and External Affairs, and Finance and Administration.

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix A

The management and operations of the New Orleans Museum of Art is overseen by the Board of Trustees. The board is comprised of twenty-one to forty-nine members at all times.<sup>14</sup> Currently, not including national trustees or honorary life members, the Museum has forty-eight board members listed in its publication, *Arts Quarterly*, in the fall 2012 issue. The Board includes a member appointed by the City Council, and the mayor of New Orleans, the chairman of the New Orleans Museum of Art Director's Council, and the president of the New Orleans Museum of Art Volunteer Committee are members *ex officio*. One additional member is elected from two individuals nominated by the Board of Commissioners of New Orleans Improvement Association. Up to three members are elected from a group nominated by the Presidents of local universities and colleges and the remaining board seats are occupied by at-large members through election.<sup>15</sup> With the guidance of the Board, the Executive Director and the dedicated NOMA staff uphold the mission of the Museum.

## **MISSION STATEMENT, VISION, AND VALUES**

As a premier fine art institution, 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.*<sup>16</sup> It is meaningful yet broad, allowing for interpretation as to the direction the Museum may go concerning exhibitions as well as how the community is engaged. It does not limit itself through a lofty and exceedingly specific mission.

The New Orleans Museum of Art further outlines its vision and core values to aid the integrity of the mission and its goals. The guiding vision of the New Orleans Museum of Art is

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<sup>14</sup> "New Orleans Museum of Art," City of New Orleans, Last modified July 23, 2013, <http://new.nola.gov/boards/new-orleans-museum-of-art/>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> "About: 100 Years."

*to advance its position as a premier national visual arts Museum vital to the cultural and educational life of our city, state and region.*<sup>17</sup> NOMA's core values are below as listed on the Museum's website:

- *Quality.* We consistently strive for excellence in all that we do. Quality in art is our fundamental objective.
- *Community.* We endeavor to reach the largest and most diverse audience to enjoy and appreciate the benefits and treasures of the Museum.
- *Integrity.* We adhere to the highest ethical standards in all Museum policies and practices for the board, staff and volunteers.
- *Stewardship.* We professionally maintain the preservation, conservation, exhibition, scholarship and accessibility of the Collection.
- *Diversity.* We are committed to serving a diverse public through innovation, enrichment and inspiration for people of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- *Education.* We seek to promote the visual arts through innovative educational programs and learning experiences to ensure broad participation from both traditional and new audiences.
- *Stability.* We maintain economic stability through responsible financial planning and management, allowing NOMA to grow and accomplish its vision and mission for the future.
- *Creativity.* We celebrate creativity in all cultures and from all periods. We continuously set high standards through openness to new ideas from the community, staff and supporters.
- *Collaboration.* We recognize the importance of collaboration with other cultural, academic, scientific and professional communities to expand our reach, leverage our resources, and diversify our audience.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

## SECTION II: DESCRIPTION OF INTERNSHIP

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The commencement of my internship at the New Orleans Museum of Art in the Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement (IAE) was in June of 2012, and its completion was in February of 2013. The majority of the hours that were required were covered over the summer of 2012. The work encompassed a variety of tasks including, but not limited to, revamping and organizing docent training materials, assisting with the preparation and facilitation of the summer teen docent program, and assisting with public programs—particularly *Friday Nights at NOMA*. In addition, I completed clerical work such as compiling lists of addresses and contacts for schools in targeted parishes. This allowed me to acquire an in-depth understanding of the Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement through practical experience.

My education about the organization and its internal working was restricted to that department, though interns at NOMA are in a unique position: the Museum makes an effort to expose interns to many aspects of the organization. Over the course of the summer, weekly educational sessions to help interns get to know the Museum were offered and organized through IAE. Each Thursday, NOMA interns were presented with the option to learn more about the Museum through presentations given by a different department. The sessions began in the Volunteer Lounge and were often followed by a tour of the presenting department's work area. Though I was not able attend every session, those I did attend were of value in regards to getting to know staff members outside IAE as well as the larger institution.

The Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement's role is vital to the fulfillment of the Museum's mission. The department's staff is responsible for linking individuals to the institution providing all inclusive access to the visual arts world—to educate,

*challenge and engage a diverse public.* The following will further detail the department and the particular programs I was involved with in various capacities and with which I became most familiar.

## **DEPARTMENT PROFILE**

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The Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement is responsible for all public programming and educational experiences at the New Orleans Museum of Art. Currently there are four full-time employees in the department with all of whom I worked closely, gaining knowledge from their experience and expertise.

The Coordinator of Interpretation and Audience Engagement provides administrative support and assistance with the development, planning, and implementation of all educational programs. The staff member in this position is also responsible for scheduling docent-guided tours, communicating the Museum's rules to teachers prior to their visit, and greeting tours to reiterate proper museum etiquette and behavior. In addition to serving as the central contact for docents, interns, and general public inquiries regarding programs, the Coordinator of Interpretation and Audience Engagement also registers students, adults, and teachers for art classes and various workshops.

The Associate Curator of Education, Tracy Kennan, was my internship supervisor. At NOMA, she is responsible for recruiting and training docents, organizing the docent programs, and supporting them in providing quality tours for school groups and the general public. This employee of NOMA plans and provides two-hour training sessions throughout the year for docents based on the permanent collection, special exhibitions, and touring methods. The Curator of Education additionally oversees and coordinates art activities that occur as part of

public programming and secures partnerships with other arts organizations and individuals to provide services for educational programming at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

The Museum Events Manager is responsible for the development and implementation of public programs related to the Museum's mission. This includes, but is not limited to, *Friday Nights at NOMA*, performances, festivals, family days, lectures, gallery talks, and film screenings both in the Museum and the Besthoff Sculpture Garden. The staff member in this position books talent for all public programming and oversees the successful implementation of every facet of these programs.

All full-time staff in IAE report to the Deputy Director of Interpretation and Audience Engagement. This staff member is essential to assuring success and cohesion within the department. The Deputy Director serves as the primary point of communication between the department and the executive staff of NOMA.<sup>18</sup>

Though the employees in this department have many individual responsibilities beyond those mentioned above, they share the responsibility of facilitating the educational programs that bring audiences of all ages into NOMA. Besides the collection itself, programs hosted by the Museum are the ongoing source of attracting the institution's audience.

## **DOCENT PROGRAM**

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Over the course of the internship, I had the opportunity to attend a few docent training sessions and other docent recruiting and social events. My primary role regarding the docent program was to assist Tracy with updating and creating materials for distribution amongst the docents, as well as helping the Coordinator of Interpretation and Audience Engagement prepare and organize such materials for convenient delivery and access to the docents during training

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix A

sessions. Additionally, I aided in the facilitation of the sessions which gave me a chance to meet some of the docents at NOMA. The docents are dedicated volunteers who conduct scheduled tours for museum visitors of all ages. Similar to most thriving museums, docents are fundamental to the museum experience and bridge the gap between the public and the collection as well as special exhibitions.

There is formal training to become a docent at NOMA and a considerable time commitment required. Docents are selected by completing the three page docent application which is made available online and through direct mail upon request. The application calls for personal information and references. In addition, the application contains questions concerning an individual's desire to become a docent and his/her expectations, educational background, experiences that would prove to be valuable in the position, and fluency working with people of various ages, cultural backgrounds, and disabilities. The application must be mailed, faxed, or emailed to the Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement by a specific date contingent on the date of the next training session.

The department contacts viable candidates for interviews which are conducted by the Curator of Education. The number of applicants accepted into the training program varies each session and is dependent upon the needs of the Museum at that time. Currently, there are approximately sixty regular docents. In addition, when major travelling exhibitions come to NOMA, special exhibition docents are trained to cover the needs of that particular exhibition. For instance, about twenty special exhibition docents will assist the Museum during the upcoming exhibition, *Portrait of Faith: John Paul II in Life and Art*.

The staff attempts to guarantee that docents are confident in their position at the Museum. There are between twelve and twenty-five docent training sessions offered every year. Docent

sessions are held on Monday mornings and last roughly two hours.<sup>19</sup> Occasionally, workshops are offered on Tuesdays during which worksheets are provided to help the docents refresh the information they have learned and are invited to get to know the collection better on their own, though staff is available for assistance. There is a theory behind the timing of docent sessions: if an individual cannot attend, then he/she is likely to be unavailable for tours. Docents must be available one day out of the week to conduct tours, typically from 9:30 to 11:00 A.M. Though NOMA opens at 11:00 A.M., school tours are allowed in as early as 9:30 A.M. for the convenience of school schedules. Previously, sessions were offered on Mondays and Tuesdays. The information presented on each date was identical, but individuals were allowed to select which day would be most opportune for them to attend. However, that method was rather time consuming for the staff and became less valuable when the number of docents dropped post-Katrina. Prior to the storm, there were approximately 120 regular docents.

Though there is not a policy on attendance, docents are asked to notify staff members when they are unable to attend; thus, they can receive any handouts or materials from the day. The department is also anxious to create a forum for docents to access recordings of training sessions. This will ensure that no one will fail to receive the proper comprehensive information from missed sessions.

Docent sessions include information on particular exhibitions. They take place in the gallery space and are guided by the Curator of Education or the curator of the specific exhibition. Supplemental materials that provide information on individual pieces may also be distributed. For example, I was given the tasks of creating and revamping descriptive passages on items in the permanent collection of African Art, producing a glossary of art terms, and assisting with the

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix B

editing of other docent materials pertaining to the collection.<sup>20</sup> When not discussing the collection, docent sessions may provide tips for touring including Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). VTS is a teaching method that is founded on open-ended, highly-structured questions based on visual works of art. It aims to increase critical thinking and forces viewers to really look at the work and draw their own conclusions. This is opposed to the traditional method of touring where the tour guide does the bulk of talking. VTS opens the lines of communication and transforms the traditional tour from a lecture to a discussion. At NOMA, the basics of VTS are covered in orientation and practiced during training sessions throughout the year.

Prior to touring, docents are required to shadow an established docent's tour. Because docent sessions are open to experienced docents and new docents in training, it is an opportunity for new docents to learn from individuals who have been providing tours and know what is expected. There are other opportunities for docents to mingle and get to know one another. The staff arranges some docent recruiting and social events while the docents themselves plan and facilitate others.

Serving as a docent is truly an opportunity to build a sense of community and family within the Museum. The staff of the Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement goes out of their way to ensure their docents are satisfied with their role at the Museum and their subsequent enthusiasm for the collection is translated to their audience. Overall, this creates a positive museum experience.

## **SUMMER TEEN DOCENTS**

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NOMA participated in NOLA Youth Works, a program that provides summer experiences aimed to provide valuable employment opportunities in the community. It caters to

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix C

individuals between the ages of thirteen and twenty-one.<sup>21</sup> The participants earn wages through the program while gaining knowledge that helps them define their career goals at various assigned sites around the city.

NOMA hosted a group of participants for about six weeks for four hours a day, Monday through Friday. Prior to their start date and during the six weeks of their appointment, I assisted Tracy with preparing for the program, and facilitating the training sessions, tours, and other responsibilities given to the teens over the course of the summer. In addition to creating all the materials the teen docents would receive, which included compiling descriptions of selected works, VTS strategies, sample tour topics, and an introduction to greet tour groups with Museum rules, I aided with training by helping the teen docents complete worksheets and activities related to the collection as well as practicing their tours.

The group consisted of high school juniors and seniors. The teens were divided into two groups upon arrival. Three workers assisted teachers with the kids' camps at NOMA, and about eight youths completed an abbreviated docent training, conducted children's tours, and were available to answer questions for patrons in the Besthoff Sculpture Garden. The group that aided the summer camps was effective and received a beneficial experience. On the other hand, the teen docent group lacked interest and enthusiasm and as a result did not receive the same experience. Another factor that contributed to this was not having a strict schedule as had the summer camp group.

The Youth Works program seemed unorganized in the beginning. For the first couple of weeks, the group fluctuated. The names that were given for the expected participants at NOMA were not the individuals that were appointed to the site, nor did the Museum receive the number

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<sup>21</sup> "NOLA Youth Works Summer Employment Program," City of New Orleans, Last modified February 16, 2013. <http://new.nola.gov/nolayouthworks/>.

of workers originally agreed upon; however, that worked out for the best, in hindsight. Once the group settled, the teen docent program began.

First, the summer teen docents were introduced to the Museum, IAE staff, and the proposed schedule. They were then given a tour of selected works which were all related to Louisiana culture, in addition to works in the Besthoff Sculpture Garden. The teen docents were given supplemental materials and worksheets to aid them in getting to know the works for which they would eventually give tours.<sup>22</sup> The group was also given touring tips such as VTS, sample questions for tours, as well as an introduction they could use to greet groups that included proper museum etiquette. Guest speakers came to assist the group with becoming comfortable speaking to audiences, adding humor, and keeping the attention of the targeted age group they would eventually tour.

The docents were given multiple opportunities to see a tour given on the selected works by Tracy and to practice touring with each other. Some of the teens were more confident than others. Thus, it was decided they could lead tours in pairs. Unfortunately, despite all the preparation, the group did not have the opportunity to tour as often as initially expected. There were very few scheduled tours that came to the Museum over the course of the program. This presented the challenge of finding other tasks for the group of eight indifferent teenagers for four hours every morning.

Midway through the program, the group learned about objects that were once used in a past outreach program, *Van Go*. The objects travelled to local schools to bring art to classrooms with which students could touch and interact. These objects were brought out of retirement and setup in the Museum with two or three teen docents to answer questions regarding the objects.

Another group of teen docents was placed in the Besthoff Sculpture Garden to answer

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix D

any questions regarding the works. Again, the group did not have much traffic nor were they dedicated to the tasks they were given. Often, they were not where they were supposed to be, they would leave early without saying anything, or would refuse to cooperate. In some ways, it became a babysitting task for Tracy and me as the teens were not dependable.

Eventually, an employee in the Museum's gift shop allowed the group to complete tasks for them. This seemed to be an improvement because there was always a staff member that could constantly keep an eye on them, and they had set duties that needed to be accomplished. The eight teens rotated between those three tasks for the remainder of the summer program.

## **FRIDAY NIGHTS AT NOMA**

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*Friday Nights at NOMA*, previously referred to as *Where Y'Art*, is a weekly recurring public program with which I became very familiar over the course of my internship. I was given the opportunity to work many facets of this particular after-hours event. Depending on the programming of the evening and the volunteers available, my tasks could include audiovisual support for film screenings and lectures, front desk admission for members and non-members, assisting with the bar, facilitating the art activity, and providing overall support for the Museum Events Manager and Volunteer Coordinator.

The New Orleans Museum of Art hosts live music, art activities, lectures, gallery talks, film screenings, and more every Friday from 5:00 to 9:00P.M. This public program aims to offer something for everyone—from the culinary to the performing arts. Generally, all aspects of the program complement the featured exhibition or correspond with a holiday, historical event, or the current happenings in the city of New Orleans. The following outlines the most common programming that takes place during *Friday Nights at NOMA*:

- *Live Music.* Live music generally takes place in the Great Hall of the Museum. Performers are mostly local artists who are known for performing around town and whose music has been screened by the Events Manager of NOMA. The amount of payment is contingent on the budget for the year, and they are also given the opportunity to sell CDs in NOMA's gift shop the evening of their performance.
- *Gallery Talks.* Tours are conducted by curators at least once in the life of a special exhibition during *Friday Nights at NOMA*. Many times, this corresponds with the opening or closing of the exhibition and there is often a spike in overall attendance depending on who is giving the tour.
- *Indoor Film Screenings.* Two or three times a month in the Stern Auditorium, films are shown. They rarely repeat and the subject matter is always related to the arts.
- *Outdoor Film Screenings.* Every year, six films are shown in the Besthoff Sculpture Garden on Friday nights—three in the spring and three in the fall. NOMA partners with the New Orleans Film Society for this program. Food vendors are also permitted to setup in the Besthoff Sculpture Garden, no more than four at a time. The attendance for outdoor films can range anywhere from 500 to 800 adults and children.
- *Art Activity.* Every Friday, a different evening art activity is planned. Ideally, the activity is not age specific. The activity is conceived and facilitated by a staff member or another local arts organization such as *YaYa* or *KIDsmART*.
- *Art You Can Eat.* This program, which became part of the Friday night programming last year, takes place in the Café NOMA. It is often a cooking demonstration organized by the Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group. Guests are also allowed to taste what is prepared during the demonstration.

### SECTION III: SWOT ANALYSIS

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SWOT analysis is a simple formula for generating strategic alternatives through the identification of internal and external factors that are complementary or dissonant to the success of an organization. There are four classifications involved in a SWOT analysis, traditionally completed in a matrix format. Internal factors are classified as *strengths* or *weaknesses*; external factors are classified as *opportunities* or *threats*. SWOT focuses on the potential of factors to have a positive or negative impact upon the organization. While practical for reducing the quantity of factors into a controllable outline, the SWOT analysis has a tendency to oversimplify through its classification of factors into categories which may not always be suitable. It tends to abbreviate the analysis into terms of black and white which ignore the inevitable gradient of gray. Thus, the classification of some factors as strengths or weaknesses, or as opportunities or threats is to some extent arbitrary. For instance, a weakness can simultaneously be an opportunity if viewed from different perspectives.

Perhaps, the true benefit of SWOT analysis is the insight the organization can gain from being aware of these factors, as opposed to the superficial classification. The acknowledgment of strengths to compensate for weaknesses and the recognition of opportunities to combat threats is half the battle won. Thus, the following will aim to highlight basic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in regards to the New Orleans Museum of Art.

**Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats**

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		<b>POSITIVE</b>	<b>NEGATIVE</b>
<b>INTERNAL</b>	<b>STRENGTHS</b>	Culture of the City Collaborations Collection Size History	Outdated Technology Internal Communication Insufficient Storage
	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	Restructuring Rebranding Physical Updates City Park Improvements	Progress of Other Organizations Image of Exclusivity Dated Identity
<b>EXTERNAL</b>			

## **INTERNAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

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### Strengths:

- *Culture of the City*. In the last few years, the city of New Orleans has begun to define its undeniable presence in the visual art world. Its thriving art scene is evident in the number, quality, and diversity of its many arts districts, museums, commercial galleries, auction houses, and artists' studios. The Arts Council of New Orleans' public art program maintains a registry consisting of more than 1,000 visual artists. Over 700 of the artists reside within the metropolitan New Orleans area.<sup>23</sup> The city is rich in culture and for most people that relates to food and music in this city; however, the visual arts scene is making its way to the forefront of people's minds locally, nationally, and internationally. In 2011, and in previous years, *American Style Magazine* ranked New Orleans third amongst the top twenty-five mid-size cities for art.<sup>24</sup> In addition, in 2012, *Forbes* published an article citing New Orleans as the fastest growing city in America and goes on to describe its culture as one of its many assets.<sup>25</sup>
- *Collaborations*. The Museum as a whole collaborates with other organizations in the city. The Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement is very involved with other organizations that team up with NOMA to execute family programs, activities, and other public programs hosted at the Museum. To name a few: Skin Horse Theater, YAYA Inc, KIDsmART, and Young Audiences Inc.

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<sup>23</sup> "Visual Artist Registry," Arts Council of New Orleans,  
<http://www.artscouncilofneworleans.org/index.php?topic=acnovar>.

<sup>24</sup> Caitlin Fultz, "Top 25 Mid-Size Cities for Art," *American Style Magazine*, May 2011,  
<http://www.americanstyle.com/2011/05/top-25-mid-sized-cities-2/>.

<sup>25</sup> Adriana Lopez, "A Look Into America's Fastest Growing City," *Forbes*, July 26, 2012,  
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/adrianalopez/2012/07/26/a-look-into-americas-fastest-growing-city>.

- *Collection.* The New Orleans Museum of Art has a strong permanent collection that continues to develop and mature. The success of the collection can be attributed to a number of factors such as its diversification. The collection spans centuries, covers numerous genres, and is not simply a collection of greatest hits. It includes artists who are renowned and some who are notable yet not well-known. There is an abundant amount of work in the collection allowing for items to circulate either on view in the galleries of NOMA or at other museums in the nation, making viewers aware of the caliber of work NOMA’s collection has to offer. This also affords frequent visitors a dynamic museum experience as opposed to repeatedly being shown a stagnant collection.
- *Size.* The Museum’s physical size has grown with its collection. In 1971, expansions tripled the size of the original structure. Due to the increased size, NOMA gained greater regional importance and for the first time was selected to host major international exhibitions such as *The Treasures of Tutankhamun* (1977-78) and *The Search for Alexander the Great* (1982). Within decades, NOMA was ready to grow again with expansions totaling 55,000 square feet. The original 1911 structure and its additions were renovated to provide a modern facility totaling 130,850 square feet.<sup>26</sup> The physical dimensions of the facility have continued to allow NOMA to host major exhibitions demanding sizable space to accommodate works and anticipated visitor traffic. Its physical size has given NOMA the edge to beat out other local venues such as the Ogden Museum of Southern Art for exhibitions like *Hard Truths: The Art of Thornton Dial* (2012)—an exhibition that would have suited the Ogden’s mission and style but

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<sup>26</sup> “About: 100 Years.”

included over forty large-scale paintings, drawings, and found-object sculptures. The sizable exhibition galleries of NOMA provide the space need to properly display exhibitions of this size and caliber.

- *History.* NOMA's history proves that it possesses the qualities essential for an art institution to withstand the test of time. Longevity and a prestigious history are attractive to donors and patrons alike. NOMA has established a strong relationship with individual donors and foundations that has aided in its financial stability. Funders of all kinds look for organizations with long successful track records to provide some assurance that their gifts will be put to proper use.

The history of NOMA is also attractive to travelling exhibitions and visitors alike. NOMA's success as a premier art institute has built a reputation that gives it the opportunity to host exhibitions that have been organized by other art institutions and curators. It proves the Museum has the capacity, concern with excellence, experience, and ability to attract an audience for such exhibitions. This same reputation is often the driving force for patron and members to continuing visiting that art institution.

#### Weaknesses:

- *Outdated Technology.* To be effective, efficient, and meet the expectation of visitors, acceptance of new technology is essential though it often comes with some challenges. Overall, NOMA has yet to completely reach this epiphany though there has been progress. NOMA is in need of updated systems and equipment related to accounting, customer service, audiovisual presentations,

external communications, and more. Though the admissions register has been updated for efficiency, the process for admitting members into the Museum could be upgraded to effectively keep track of the number of members attending daily or during specific public programs. Another example of NOMA's technological weakness is its reliance on internet access hosted by the City of New Orleans. This results in limited bandwidth and often an unreliable or slow connection. This presents an issue with employee time efficiency and external communications such as email and video conferences via services like Skype.

- *Internal Communication.* From my point of view as an intern, limited primarily to the workings of one department, it appeared that though each department of the Museum is effective. There is a lack of cohesive and efficient internal communication between departments as a result of its hierarchical structure and protocols. As examples, if a decision is time sensitive there should not be a gap in communication between departments and communication protocols should not become obstacles; if discounted admission is marketed the front desk should be promptly notified; and if employees are given the proper tools and instructions to execute tasks, every detail should not have to be approved. The unavailability of some senior staff members can slow progress and efficiency. Confused marketing, delayed responses and decision-making, along with micromanaging can lead to frustrated employees, confused and unsatisfied patrons, and the loss of funding. In short, channels of communication should be direct to alleviate frustrations, some control should be relinquished to ensure rapid progress, and pertinent information

should be disseminated to anyone who could potentially be affected or those employees who will interface with the general public.

- *Insufficient Storage.* Hurricane Katrina exposed the weaknesses of the art storage facilities at NOMA. Pre-Katrina, much of the on-site storage was inadequate and some of it remains that way. In 2005, the basement leaks caused by Hurricane Katrina crippled the Museum. The concrete floors of the basement experienced unprecedented hydrostatic pressure which compromised the area that provides office space, equipment storage, and most importantly art storage. This forced the Museum to remove the art that was stored in the basement to above-ground galleries on the first and second floors where they remain.<sup>27</sup> Thus, spaces which were designed with a specific purpose have been altered to provide up-to-code art storage. An example of this is that the area that served as the education class in which art classes were conducted has been converted into art storage. Currently, art classes are conducted in an area that was once the docent lounge. This area is not as adequate as the original classroom because it is smaller, lacks sinks, and access to the Museum's galleries is not as convenient.

## **EXTERNAL OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS**

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### Opportunities:

- *Restructuring.* In 2010, Susan Taylor stepped into the role of Executive Director of the New Orleans Museum of Art. She is the successor of John Bullard who retired after thirty-eight years of dedicated work at the institution. In addition,

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<sup>27</sup> Doug MacCash, "The New Orleans Museum of Art to Receive \$8.1 Million Hurricane Repairs," *The Times-Picayune*, September 20, 2012, [http://www.nola.com/arts/index.ssf/2012/09/new\\_orleans\\_museum\\_of\\_art\\_to\\_r.html](http://www.nola.com/arts/index.ssf/2012/09/new_orleans_museum_of_art_to_r.html).

other positions were filled even within the months I spent completing my internship. A new Deputy Director of Development and External Affairs and a Communications and Marketing Manager were named replacing seasoned members of NOMA's staff. The opening of positions currently and within the last few years presents the opportunity to restructure, redistribute responsibilities, and redefine job descriptions to become more progressive, efficient, and remain relevant.

- *Rebranding.* Within the last two years major steps have been taken toward changing the image of the Museum in the eyes of the general public. The launch of NOMA's new website gained the Museum some digital prestige.<sup>28</sup> This was followed by the creation of a new logo.<sup>29</sup> Currently, the Museum is in the process of streamlining its social media presence, which is needed but presents some complications. All communication via the Museum's social media accounts must be posted by the Communications and Marketing Manager. It almost defeats the purpose of social media when an employee cannot post an official Museum-sponsored message or comment as events are happening. If the Communications and Marketing Manager is not present at an after-hours event, the Museum's social media presence is only made relevant if patrons are posting via their personal accounts. Immediacy and timeliness are the keys to the success of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Though this problem needs to be

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<sup>28</sup> Sally Tunmer, "The New Orleans Museum of Art Gains Digital Prestige In Its 100th Year," *GO NOLA*, November 07, 2011, <http://www.gonola.com/2011/11/07/the-new-orleans-museum-of-art-gains-digital-prestige-in-its-100th-year.html>.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix E

rectified, it is still an opportunity for NOMA to have a clearly defined voice on social media networks to enhance its brand.

The rebranding effort is also an opportunity for the Museum to bring in exhibitions, performers, and speakers who are outside of the usual and appeal to a different audience. Undergoing intensive rebranding is one of the major opportunities an institution like NOMA can experience. If taken advantage of properly, all aspects should create positive perceptions of continuous improvement, excitement, revitalization, and a new-found relevance.

- *Physical Updates.* NOMA received a partial but much needed facelift in 2013. The Museum updated its floors and the flow of exhibition space and the carpeted floors were replaced with hardwood. Such minor changes have made a major difference in the museum experience. The smells that were once nostalgic and had become a little distracting, no longer exist. The dated aesthetic has been revitalized with modern appeal. There is much to be said for making a statement all at once when rebranding. Since the inside of the building is undergoing some permanent renovations—it seems apropos at this time to alter the manner in which the Museum is perceived by its audience.
- *City Park Improvements.* City Park is a staple New Orleans location found at the heart of the city. It attracts people from every demographic. City Park is a place to picnic, play sports, wander through gardens, or take a boat ride amongst the largest collection of mature live oaks in the world. With its many attractions, City Park hosts approximately eleven million visitors each year.<sup>30</sup> In 2005, The Board of Commissioner of the City Park Improvement Association adopted *City Park*

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<sup>30</sup> “About Us,” New Orleans City Park New Orleans, <http://neworleanscitypark.com>.

2018 as a master plan for improvement and additions to the Park. Since 2005, in addition to Hurricane Katrina repairs, 4,000 trees have been planted, the Casino Building, the North Golf Course, Tad Gormley and Pan American Stadiums, and the practice track surface have all been renovated. Four miles of new sidewalks and jogging paths have been installed as well as a high-tech playground and dog park. There is much more to come according to the plan.<sup>31</sup>

The enhancement of City Park presents an opportunity for NOMA to profit off the potential increase in visitors to the Park. The Museum is visible to anyone who may come to the Lelong Avenue area of the park. Once in that location, as someone becomes aware of the grand structure complete with massive columns and griffins mounted atop, he/she may become curious and potentially will walk through the doors of the Museum. Even those who are acquainted to some extent with the Museum remain intrigued when passing by. Though a visitor to City Park may not initially aim to attend the Museum, it is possible he/she will once in the area.

Threats:

- *Progress of Other Organizations.* In the city of New Orleans, there are numerous visual art institutions. Many of these organizations have like programming and may have aspects that the art community prefers, such as location or current exhibitions. In addition to similar programs, within recent years, other local arts organizations have also restructured and are seemingly doing so at a faster rate than NOMA. The Museum's lack of urgency to fill positions, sign off on

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<sup>31</sup> "Capital/Master Plan Updates," New Orleans City Park New Orleans, <http://neworleanscitypark.com>.

programs, as well as to fully implement its new logo is an opportunity for other organizations to move ahead of NOMA.

- *Image of Exclusivity.* It is complicated when confronted with the task of improving brands or the persona the institution has gained over the years. It seems many people in the community believe NOMA to be an intimidating, exclusive, and stale venue. It is a stigma many museums have to overcome. The structure is physically imposing and once visitors enter the front door they are first greeted by security guards and often a silent atmosphere. All these factors add to the intimidation associated with the Museum. Many individuals who grew up during segregation remember not being allowed to visit the Museum and City Park at all or only on specific days. Willie Birch, one of the city's most renowned African American artists who came of age during segregation, recalls visiting NOMA as a sixth-grader and gathering the impression *that this is not for you*.<sup>32</sup> The longer the legacy, the more difficult it is to surmount impressions generated from previous generations that have been passed down.
- *Dated Identity.* NOMA's core audience and donor pool are ageing without strong youthful replacements in sight. If new and more vibrant visitors and donors are not identified, the pillars of its social and financial strength will be weakened. A fresh identity can help attract the next generation to NOMA.

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<sup>32</sup>Miranda Lash, KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana, "Willie Birch," <http://www.knowla.org/entry.php?rec=1212>.

While simply identifying factors as those outlined above is valuable, the greatest value in the exercise is precipitating responsive action. The goal of conducting SWOT analyses is to assist nonprofits in producing action plans to sustain the positive, alter the negative, maximize opportunities, and minimize the threats to operations, mission, vision, and values. It is virtually impossible to have prolonged existence in today's competitive funding environment without conducting self-assessments on a regular basis.

## SECTION IV: BEST PRACTICES, ALTERNATIVE METHODS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The aim of this chapter, through exploring best practices and alternative methods for interpretation and audience engagement programs in combination with my experiences as a graduate student, is to arrive at recommendations for the Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement of NOMA. There are a number of associations that provide best practices and standards for museums. The information necessary for this chapter and subsequent recommendations is gathered from the American Alliance of Museums and the Museums Association and their affiliates in addition to alternative methods reported by individual art institutions.

The American Alliance of Museums' (AAM) mission is *to nurture excellence in museums through advocacy and service*. The American Alliance of Museums accomplishes its mission by developing standards and best practices, providing resources and career development, and advocating for museums to thrive.<sup>33</sup> The Museums Association is the oldest association of its kind in the world. Its purpose is to guard the interests of museums and galleries. The Museums Association's mission is *to enhance the value of museums to society by sharing knowledge, developing skills, inspiring innovation, and providing leadership*.<sup>34</sup>

AAM makes available facts in regards to the cultural, economic, and educational importance museums serve nationally, such as:

There are approximately 850 million visits each year to American museums, more than the attendance for all major league sporting events and theme parks combined.

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<sup>33</sup> "About Us," American Alliance of Museums, <http://www.aam-us.org/about-us>.

<sup>34</sup> "About | Museums Association," Museums Association. <http://www.museumsassociation.org/about>.

Museums tell important stories by collecting, preserving, researching, and interpreting objects, living specimens and historical records. Museums help communities better understand and appreciate cultural diversity.

Museums spend more than \$2 billion a year on education activities; the typical museum devotes three-quarters of its education budget to K-12 students. Museums receive more than 90 million visits each year from students in school groups. Museums help teach the state, local, or core curriculum, tailoring their programs in math, science, art, literacy, language arts, history, civics and government, economics and financial literacy, geography, and social studies.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, AAM offers ethics, standards, and best practices by which museums should abide.

Below is the list of standards in regards to education and interpretation:

- The museum clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.
- The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation.
- The museum's interpretive content is based on appropriate research.
- Museums conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards.
- The museum uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences, and resources.
- The museum presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences.
- The museum demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities.
- The museum assesses the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and uses those results to plan and improve its activities.

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<sup>35</sup> "About Museums: Facts," American Alliance of Museums, <http://www.aam-us.org/about-museums/facts>.

The following will offer best practices, alternative methods, and recommendations in regards to the IAE programs described in Section II.

## **TOURS**

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Within the last decade, the ways in which visitors experience museums' collections have evolved. Technology has provided online learning opportunities, smart phone museum applications, and other methods of dispersing information. These advancements have impacted museums and their educational practices by expanding interaction beyond their physical boundaries and creating new channels of outreach and communication—ultimately shifting how museums interact with visitors. Museums should be flexible and equipped to facilitate different types of experiences that can occur onsite and offsite or online.<sup>36</sup>

Traditional tours facilitated by docents begin with greeting groups of visitors and leading them through the galleries, stopping at works which the docents have selected to discuss. These typically last about sixty minutes and conclude with the group members continuing their visits on their own or simply leaving. Docents are a valuable asset to museums and serve as a bridge between visitors and collections. However, they are volunteers and are not always available and often have limited knowledge of the permanent collections. In addition, if visitors are not a part of scheduled tours, they are often left to inform themselves about the art through wall text and labels. Many art museums are devoid of interactive or audiovisual displays and audio guides for visitors who would like more information than is provided in wall texts and object captions.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Herminia Din, and William B. Crow, "Museums Unfixed in Place and Time," *The American Alliance of Museums*, no. July/August (2009), <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/publications/museum-magazine/museums-unfixed-in-place-and-time>.

<sup>37</sup>Javier Pes, "The New York Folk Art Museum, New York," *Museums Association: Museum Practice*, no. 20 (2002): 32-39, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/1361>.

Audio can be a great way to connect with visitors. While there are some issues with audio displays, such as sound spill between displays and distracting other visitors, audio guides are becoming essential to the museum experience. Audio guides are another method of communicating directly with visitors and liberating them from having to read text or the time, group requirements, and selection limitations of a docent guided tour. Though the audio guides eliminate the back and forth exchange of dialogue, there are other specific advantages of audio guides listed by the Museums Association:<sup>38</sup>

- Provide spoken material in languages other than English
- Produce a variety of guides to meet the needs of particular categories of users (such as the highlights of collections, and tours for young children, school groups or people with impaired vision)
- Provide users with a personal experience which they can control (to varying degrees) to suit their needs

There are numerous avenues to facilitate this type of guided tour. In addition to the traditional hand held guides, some organizations have embraced mobile technology. Using mobile technology is a growing aspect of museum interpretation and engagement practice—from Wi-Fi in galleries and multimedia tours to smartphone apps and QR (Quick Response) codes. Though smartphone applications can be expensive to develop, coupling with social media can provide a new marketing tool.

At the Brooklyn Museum, visitors can use *BklynMuse* and create their own gallery tours by entering one object of interest into the application which then recommends other related

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<sup>38</sup> David Martin, “Interpretation Special: Audio Guide,” *Museums Association: Museum Practice*, no. 13 (2000): 17-74, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/4526>.

works the visitor might enjoy.<sup>39</sup> In addition, visitors can suggest objects to fellow visitors and see others' selections.<sup>40</sup> Prior to their visits, patrons can connect to the museum's website to create sets of related objects and later access and share those sets via their smartphone upon their arrival at the Brooklyn Museum.

Failing to embrace the internet is not only out-of-touch with current audience expectations, but it also runs the risk of an organization becoming irrelevant, particularly when people increasingly manage their professional and personal lives online.<sup>41</sup> Online learning can give those not able to make it to the museum the chance to immerse themselves in the collection and also prepare those who are planning a visit to the museum. The museum experience can be enhanced if visitors have already been exposed to the collection. The end goal is to provide convenient access to the collection to as many people as possible.

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Not all visitors to the New Orleans Museum of Art are in the position to receive a docent-guided tour. For these visitors, simple steps could be taken by the Museum to make the experience more convenient and information more accessible. For instance, more standard exhibition maps should be available to all guests at all times. Also, though there are currently some audiovisual components, an effort to make an audiovisual guide more accessible and marketed to visitors is needed. While developing a smartphone app may not be the way to go because of the associated expense, other options are available that the Museum should explore. For instance, a web based tour accessible online through NOMA's website or the options of

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<sup>39</sup> Laura Donnelly Smith, "Get Smart (phones)," *American Alliance of Museums*, no. May/June (2010), [http://aam-us.org/resources/publications/museum-magazine/get-smart\(phones\)](http://aam-us.org/resources/publications/museum-magazine/get-smart(phones)).

<sup>40</sup> "Brooklyn Museum: Visit: BklynMuse," Brooklyn Museum, <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/visit/bklynmuse.php>.

<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Atkinson, "The Rise of the Mobile Museum," *Museums Association: Museum Practice*, May 15, 2012, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/mobile-projects/15052012-the-rise-of-the-mobile-museum>.

planning a personal audio tour before arriving to the Museum are less financially taxing. Additions such as these would be an enhancement to the online learning that already exists, though are not intended to replace the museum experience. Overall, the goal is to connect and educate by making the collection and experience more accessible, convenient, relatable, and memorable both on-site and online.

In regards to docent guided tours and docent training, IAE does an excellent job of disseminating information regarding the permanent collection and travelling exhibitions. However, the demographics of the docents do not reflect the demographics of visitors or the community which NOMA serves. To diversify the docent group, alterations to the program must be considered.

Docent training does occupy staff's time; however, by occasionally offering training on different days of the week and times of day NOMA may attract other volunteers. For example, a graduate student may not be able to attend docent training on a Monday morning, but that does not exclusively imply he/she is not able to lead tours on any other day of the week. Promoting docent training to local graduate schools within art related departments could potentially attract a younger demographic of docents which could relate to younger tour groups more effectively than the current docents. Additionally, different levels of required time commitment could be implemented. For example, docents at the graduate student level could have the same training as all docents but only be required to tour once a month opposed to every week. Also, reaching out to local community groups to recruit docents could attract volunteers with various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Once docent training material is available online, I believe it will create the opportunity for docent training to alternate days and become more convenient for a more diverse group of volunteers.

## YOUTH PROGRAMS

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It can often be difficult to attract young audiences and keep their interest once they are in the doors. Many museums have found that youth panels can help them attract a younger and more diverse audience. They can provide advice on marketing, outreach, and many other aspects of the museum experience. The Museums Association provides a list of benefits from youth panels for institutions and youths, some of which are listed below:<sup>42</sup>

- Some of the benefits that youth panels offer museums include:
  - Helping to bring in more young people, particularly teenagers, an age group that museums traditionally find difficult to attract
  - Developing appropriate marketing material for young people in terms of age-appropriate designs and the use of social media
  - Improving community links by creating close working relationships with young people who act as ambassadors for the museum
  - Improving communication between different departments, as youth panels usually work across the museum
  - Changing young people's attitudes about a museum, giving it a younger, more contemporary image
- Some of the benefits of being a youth panel member include:
  - The chance to learn practical skills including research and problem-solving
  - Improved self-confidence

AAM directs its members to one of its affiliates, the Association of Science-Technology Centers, which reviews the key components of youth programs and helps museums through best practices in their design and implementation of youth programs. Though the information is not

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<sup>42</sup> Simon Stephens, "Why work with youth panels?," *Museums Association: Museum Practice*, January 15, 2013, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/youth-panels/15012013-panel-discussions>.

specific to art institution, it is relevant to the youth programs at NOMA. The information listed on their website includes the following:

- Meeting the needs of adolescent development
  - Increase her or his sense of self-worth
  - Stay focused on and motivated by her or his goals
  - Form positive relationships with adults who serve as mentors and role models
  - Acquire autonomy and accountability in decision-making
- Participants in youth programs develop intellectually
  - Hone their creative problem-solving skills
  - Perfect their critical faculties
- Participants in youth programs gain social competence
  - Enhance their communication skills
  - Develop leadership skills and the confidence to use them
  - Understand the value of team work
- Participants in youth programs learn about the world of work
  - Receive respect and recognition for their accomplishments
  - Appreciate the high expectations that museum staff have for them
  - Feel valued by a larger institution/community
  - Develop a code of ethics and a sense of responsibility to a larger community

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The New Orleans Museum of Art's audience lacks a core group of youth from the community. Though the Summer Teen Docent program brought adolescents to the Museum, it did not captivate them or entice them to become repeat visitors. NOMA does not meet the best

practices and standards listed above in regards to youth programs. The relationship with the teen docents was not beneficial for either party as originally intended. The program did not aid the Museum with attracting more young people or changing their attitudes towards museums in general. The youth did not gain skills which could translate to their future ambitions and educational paths. The teen docents were not accountable, motivated, nor did they develop a sense of responsibility to community.

From my understanding through speaking with members of NOMA's staff, there was a teen advisory board at one time which faded out. I suggest NOMA revamp and develop a teen panel. To ensure a different outcome, the suggestions of the teen panel should be taken seriously and implemented within reason. Due to the fact that the administration has been restructured, the teen panel will be under different guidance and may have the chance to flourish if properly implemented. For the teen panel, initially, participants can be recruited from schools and other community organizations with which relationships exist. From the teen panel, NOMA can select teen docents who are well aware of the expectations and goals of the program. To properly develop a summer teen docent program, I believe the NOMA staff should be in direct control of the application and interview process as opposed to a third party organization. Elimination of the third party means that funds would need to be identified through a grant to offer participants stipends for the summer. If the Museum does intend to implement the program through NOLA Youth Works in the future, the structure should cater more to the goals of the teens, provide them with practical skills, ensure their time will be occupied, make sure they are comfortable with the tasks given, and focus on cultivating relationships.

## LATE NIGHT PROGRAMS

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Late Night Programming, for means of this study, refers to any regularly scheduled public programming that occurs after general hours of operation. It is a different and effective way in which museums are attracting new audiences and altering the attitudes towards the institution. Increasingly, museums are approaching late-night openings differently. Museums are programming various events and activities with agendas designed to attract new audiences and change the perceptions of the venue.<sup>43</sup>

Although the theme changes from event to event, the formula stays the same: food and drink is always available from the start to set the tone that this is a social occasion; a range of activities are on offer around the museum at different times throughout the event; and the entrance is always used to create a sense of ambience—normally through an art installation.<sup>44</sup>

While the collection remains the star of the event, the concept is to engage a different more diverse audience and to become relevant to that audience. Because the aim is to attract a new audience while maintaining the current, marketing is often different for after-hour events. Unlike promoting exhibitions, late night events often require collaborations such as working with other venues, tourist agencies, local influential blogger, featured artists and musicians, and of course social media.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Atkinson, “Why hold late-night events?,” *Museums Association: Museum Practice*, December 14, 2012, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/late-night-events/14122012-why-hold-late-night-events>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Atkinson, “Marketing late-night events,” *Museums Association: Museum Practice*, December 14, 2012, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/late-night-events/14122012-marketing-late-night-events>.

For young adults with a busy schedule – especially in cities where there is plenty of competition from bars, nightclubs, restaurants and theatres – grabbing their attention right up to the opening time is essential.<sup>46</sup>

The Ogden of Museum of Southern Art has done a superb job of developing its late night event, *Ogden After Hours*. While the program focuses on music and the exhibition generally takes a backseat, it still fulfills the mission of the Ogden—to *broaden the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the visual arts and culture of the American South*. Though this approach may not work for all arts institutions the Ogden has branded itself as one of the city’s unique venues for music on Thursdays. Thursday nights involve live music from southern artists, southern food from a well-known local cook, and drinks, creating a combination for a successful social event.

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I believe a key issue NOMA faces with its late night program is a lack of identity. The name has recently changed to *Friday Nights at NOMA*, but it does not yet have a distinct brand of its own. The essentials for executing the late night programming are there, but they could be amplified. Musical performances typically take place in the Museum’s Great Hall which is its main entrance space. The Great Hall is vast and very traditional. For *Friday Nights*, it could use some ambience such as lighting, signage, or featured art installations to aid in the branding of the program. The city is inspired by music. If the budget of *Friday Nights at NOMA* was enhanced, even occasionally, better known musicians could be afforded who would attract their fans. This would again bring in more diverse audiences. To aid in the diversification of the audience and to counter the lack of social media activity from the Museum during *Friday Nights*, patrons could be incentivized to comment, post, tweet, or check in via their personal Facebook or Twitter

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

accounts using their smartphones with the offer of discounted admission or free drinks. Also, the bar could be more extensive and offer featured seasonal drinks, or the Museum could partner with local bars in the area to create specialty or signature drinks. Also, partnering with neighborhood bars and restaurants could create the potential for after *Friday Nights at NOMA* activities. For example, if you were at NOMA, you could receive half off a drink or an appetizer—creating a cross promotion opportunity for the night. Café NOMA closes at 9:00. To avoid competition, the promotion could be time sensitive starting at 8:30 or 9:00. Partnering with area bars and restaurants would enhance the sense of neighborhood and community while alleviating the challenge NOMA faces, which is a lack of restaurants and bars within walking distance. Patrons could start their Friday night at NOMA and end it with a nightcap from a participating neighboring bar. After all, it is Friday night in a city known for good food and cocktails.

*Friday Nights* often features films and lectures about or given by notable artists and curators. However, the auditorium is in need of updating. The equipment is temperamental and outdated making it more complicated to execute a high caliber of programming. If funds were dedicated to audiovisual improvements and a few cosmetic updates, the auditorium would be more attractive for Museum programming and rentals. *Movies in the Garden* is a popular program with attendance ranging from 500 to 800 where attendance on an average Friday evening is between 150 and 200. To feed off the success of *Movies in the Garden*, if the auditorium's equipment were updated, an indoors film series could be developed—something more avant-garde in comparison to the films typically shown during *Friday Nights*. Overall, *Friday Nights at NOMA* has proved a success, warranting building on the existing programming, with the goal of expanding its audience.

## CONCLUSION

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Coming into its second century, The New Orleans Museum of Art has successfully maintained its integrity and quality holding steadfast to its classification as a premiere fine arts institution. Its development is deeply rooted in the culture and legacy of the city. Today, the Museum is connected to the community through programming, most of which is developed, managed, and implemented by the Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement.

The approach to audience engagement and interpretation employed by the department aims to break down barriers through entertaining programming and creativity. The potential outcome is greater audience reach which can translate into the improvement of other aspects of the Museum, such as the cultivation of new donors and more media attention.

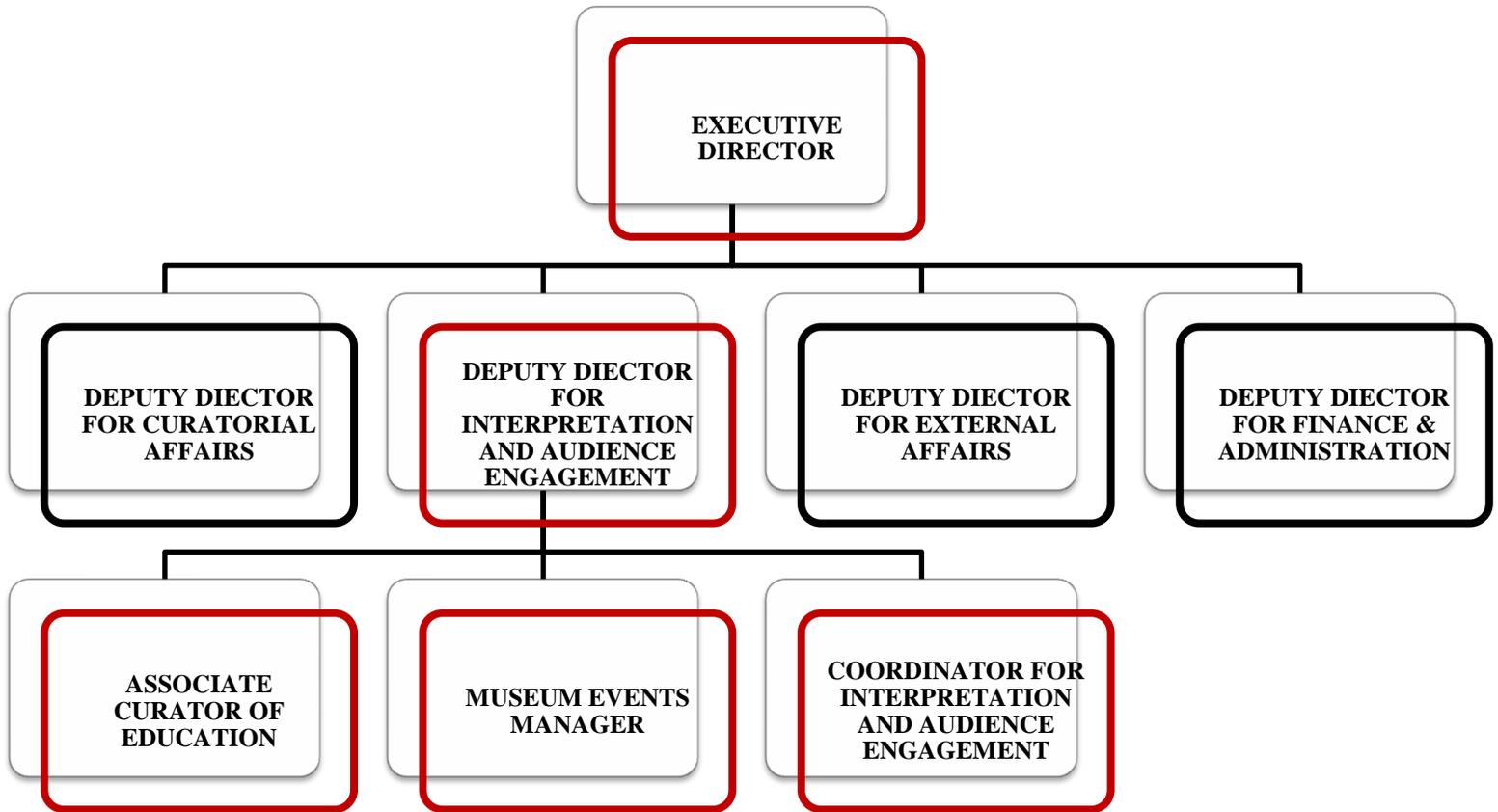
Moving forward, the Museum should energetically continue on its path of growth and rebranding, as well as forming a deeper connection to the community which it serves. This can be achieved through being aware of all strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats while ensuring that strengths compensate for weaknesses and opportunities outweigh threats; making the collection and experience more accessible, convenient, relatable, and memorable both on-site and online; cultivating a more diverse group of volunteers; bonding with youths; funding improvements to allow for growth and promotion of late night programming.

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I would like to thank the Museum for giving me the opportunity to grow with the institution during my graduate internship. In addition, extend special appreciation to those staff members with whom I worked closely. My time spent at the New Orleans Museum of Art in the Department of Interpretation and Audience Engagement was truly a pleasure and a positive learning experience.

**A. ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

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## B. DOCANT TRAINING SCHEDULE

### DOCENT TRAINING SCHEDULE Fall 2012

Date and Time		Session Topic	Meeting Place
Mon., Sept. 4	9:30(10:00)-12:30	Orientation Brunch <i>Photography, Sequence, and Time</i> Speakers: Tracy Kennan, Russell Lord	1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Lobby
Mon., Oct. 1	10:00-12:30	The Art of Observation Speaker: Tracy Kennan	1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Lobby
Tues., Oct. 2	10:00-12:00	Optional Workshop	
Mon., Oct. 8	10:00-12:30	<i>Jim Richard: Make Yourself at Home</i> Speaker: Miranda Lash <i>Bayou School: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Louisiana Landscapes</i> Speaker: Rachel Stephens	1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Lobby
Tues., Oct. 9	10:00-12:00	Optional Workshop	
Mon., Oct. 15	10:00-12:30	Elements of Art and Design Speaker: Tracy Kennan	1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Lobby
Tues., Oct. 16	10:00-12:00	Optional Workshop	
Mon., Oct. 22	10:00-12:30	Native American and Pre-Colombian Art Speaker: Paul Tarver	1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Lobby
Mon., Oct. 29	10:00-12:30	African Art Speaker: Bill Fagaly	2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor Lobby
Mon., Nov. 5	10:00-12:30	Chinese Art Speaker: Lisa Rotondo-McCord	3 <sup>rd</sup> Floor Lobby
Tues., Nov. 6	10:00-12:00	Optional Workshop	
Mon., Nov. 12	10:00-12:30	Introduction to <i>Lifelike</i> <i>Ida Kohlmeyer</i> Speakers: Miranda Lash, Anne Roberts	1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Lobby
Mon., Nov. 19	10:00-12:30	<i>Lifelike</i> Speakers: Siri Engberg	1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Lobby
Tues., Nov. 20	10:00-12:00	Optional Workshop	
Mon., Nov. 26	10:00-12:30	Oceanic Art Speaker: Peggy McDowell	2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor Lobby
Mon., Dec. 3	10:00-12:30	Presentations	2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor Lobby
Mon., Dec. 10	10:00-12:30	Holiday Party and Cookie Exchange	Board Room

#### Key

Joint Session for Master Docents and Apprentice Docents
Apprentice Docent Session
Optional Workshop Session

Updated 9/28/12

Docent Training will resume on  
Monday, January 7, 2013

## C. DOCENT GLOSSARY

Excerpt: Page 1 of 8

### Glossary of Art Terms

**Abstract Art:** 20<sup>th</sup> century art style that experimented with the elements of art (line, color, shape, form and texture) and emphasized form and emotion over recognizable subject matter. Artistic representations were often generalized, universal, and non-representational. Artists who worked in this style include Wasily Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock. (*image 1*)



1. Wasily Kandinsky. Sketch for "Several Circles." 1926

**Abstract Expressionism:** Painting style developed and popularized after World War II during the 1940s and 1950s in New York City. Artists who worked in this style made no attempt to represent identifiable subjects. Expression was sought through gestural painting and spontaneity. Color Field painting and action painting were two different styles within Abstract Expressionism. (*image 2*)

**Academic Art:** Works by artists who adhere to conventions and aesthetic doctrines dictated by national schools of art (academies) which are accepted as an authority. Art academies have included the French Académie des Beaux-Arts, the English Royal Academy of Art and, in America, the Pennsylvania Academy of Art. Academic art in NOMA's collection include William-Adolphe Bouguereau and Jean-Léon Gérôme.

**Action Painting:** Action painters applied paint freely to canvases in rapid forceful strokes by splashing, hurling or dripping paint. Artists who painted in this style include Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock and Sam Francis.

**Aerial Perspective:** Also referred to as atmospheric perspective. A method utilized by artists to suggest a far distance in a landscape painting. As the distance between an object and the viewer increases, outlines become less precise and colors become less pronounced and bluer.

**Aesthetic:** The branch of philosophy that provides a theory relating to the nature of beauty and fine art in accordance with the accepted notions of good taste.

**Art Criticism:** An organized system implemented to discuss and evaluate visual art in terms of beauty and aesthetics. It consists of four stages: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment.

**Art Nouveau:** An artistic movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that was especially seen in decorative arts and architecture. The movement focused on the abolishment of the traditional hierarchy of the arts, which viewed painting and sculpture as being superior to craft-based decorative arts. Art Nouveau was first popular throughout Europe and spread internationally. The style includes exaggerated, asymmetrical forms including whiplash curves, flames, waves, and stylized female forms.



2. Sam Francis. *White Line I*. 1959.

**Avant-garde:** A term derived from the French word meaning "before the group" or the French military term meaning "front line." Avant-garde denotes artists and concepts which abandon tradition in search of a strikingly new, experimental, or radical perspective for the time. The content is often unfamiliar and shocking.

## D. SUMMER TEEN DOCENT HANDOUT

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### Excerpt: Page 2 of 8

2. **Ralston Crawford**  
**Brass Band Parade, ca. 1950-60s**  
**Gelatin Silver Print**  
**(1<sup>st</sup> Floor, special exhibition)**
  
3. **Ralston Crawford**  
**933 St. Louis Street, French Quarter, ca. 1950-60s**  
**Gelatin Silver Print**  
**(1<sup>st</sup> Floor, special exhibition)**

Though he is often remembered for his pre-World-War II precisionist paintings of urban and industrial subjects, Ralston Crawford produced a significant body of work after 1949 inspired by the culture of New Orleans. This summer, NOMA will present *Ralston Crawford and Jazz*, an exhibition that considers the relationships between music, photography, painting, drawing and film as they intersect in Crawford's work in New Orleans. Organized by the Sheldon Art Galleries, in Saint Louis, Missouri, the exhibition includes 148 photographs, prints, paintings, drawings and films, many never before published.

Different aspects of New Orleans have inspired many artists and writers, but for Crawford, New Orleans jazz music had the most profound effect. In his work, Crawford imported the elements of jazz—syncopation, polyphony, and improvisation—and transformed them into visual strategies. Thinking along these lines, Crawford produced photographs of jazz musicians that are as punchy and rhythmic as the music that his subjects played. He made equally strong, graphic photographs of the cemeteries, weathered buildings, signage, and boats at dock. Always inventive, Crawford also interpreted these same scenes in lithographs, paintings, and films. This exhibition brings together works in all of these media and, in some cases, displays the painting, lithograph, or drawing, next to the photograph that inspired it.

Although Crawford never lived in New Orleans for any long amount of time, he continued to visit throughout the rest of his life. Many works in the exhibition highlight the strong personal connections that Crawford developed during these visits to New Orleans and its community. His candid photographs of jazz musicians such as Billie and Dede Pierce, “Wooden” Joe Nicholas, and Bill Matthews suggest a mutual respect or even friendship. In the early 1960s, Crawford's photographs of New Orleans streets, signage, and buildings were used as cover images for Riverside Records' *New Orleans Living Legends* jazz series.

Crawford was born in St. Catharine's, Ontario, Canada in 1906 and spent his childhood in Buffalo, NY. He studied art at the Otis Art Institute, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the Barnes Foundation. During World War II, he served as chief of the Visual Presentation Unit of the Weather Division in the Army Air Force. After the War, he taught painting in Honolulu, Cincinnati, and New Orleans. In 1985, his work was the focus of a major retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. When Ralston Crawford died in 1978, he was buried in New Orleans St. Louis Cemetery No. 3, with a jazz funeral.

**E. NOMA Logo**

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**Top Image: New Orleans Museum of Art's logo prior to 2012**

**Bottom Image: New Orleans Museum of Art's current logo**



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