

Is the Mission the Message?

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Museum Mission Statements

By

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B.A. University of Denver, 2014

M.S. Michigan Technological University, 2017

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Science

CU Museum of Natural History

2020

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Thesis directed by Sharon Tinianow, Special Projects Manager, CU Museum of Natural History

ABSTRACT

Mission statements are a staple of museum institutional practice, and are intended as accessible texts that are used to guide internal action as well as communicate purpose to an external audience. This study analyzes mission statements from non-collecting contemporary art museums in the United States, and uses data from tax filings to determine whether or not mission statements adequately communicate both museum intent and practice. The museum is posited as a medium that communicates and participates in social, cultural, and political discourse, and must therefore contend with the reception and response of various interpretive communities that engage with museum texts. This study found that mission statements are not the most effective at communicating critical museum practice, but are still able to plainly communicate some basic purpose and intent on behalf of the institution. Ultimately, it would be productive for museums to utilize mission statements as a point of reflection for museum scholarship and practice moving forward.

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Introduction

The museum is not a politically, socially, or culturally neutral institution, and the institutional mission statement has the potential to be an accessible pathway to understanding the museum's ultimate reason for being. In her exploration of the concept of "loving, knowing ignorance," Lisa Gilbert states of museums, "the institution is an entity with perception: it perceives the world before laying it out in gallery cases for visitors to perceive. This perception is not neutral but intersects with societal power in a way that represents an inherently political act" (133). Museums are inherently political institutions that implicitly communicate perceptions of the world through methods of display, physical and visual design, and calculated word choice throughout museum texts. In order to discern a museum's perception of the world and purpose for being, mission statements provide a succinct point of access to institutional intention and aspiration. Mission statements act as an ontological indicator, and the inclusion or exclusion of certain ideas and terms define both the nature of work within the museum, as well as the perceived nature of the audience that interacts with the institution. The mission statement, by employment of very calculated terms, attempts to provide an explanation as to why the museum exists. The combination of public social institution, diverse academic research hub, and professionalized field of theory and practice causes every decision made by a museum

to be viewed by a variety of audiences with a variety of backgrounds and level of understanding.

As such, the ultimate goals of this project are to, 1. Provide a theoretical grounding for the interpretation and use of mission statements based in museological discourse, and, 2. Critically analyze the relationship between mission statement language and institutional action through a series of case studies, which will more deeply examine how museums might be perceived as fulfilling their missions during a time of global pandemic in which physical access to museum spaces is unavailable or significantly restricted. While public museums often carry missions to educate and exhibit for the public, this project aims to critically analyze the language of mission statements along with publicly accessible and available programs and practices as methods of discourse in order to answer the question: Do museum mission statements accurately, succinctly, and critically portray museum purpose and practice to public audiences, especially during a time when those audiences may or may not have access to or familiarity with the museum's physical location and objects?

Mission Statements

Mission statements came out of corporate strategic planning practices, which gained popularity in the 1960s (Kapucu). By the 1980s, strategic planning became more widely used by non-profit organizations, such as museums, as it became useful

for marketing in this sector (Kapucu). The mission statement grew out of this practice, as "Strategic planning clearly defines the purpose of the organization" and that "Formal strategic-planning approaches establish...mission, goals, and visions" (Kapucu). In order to create an effective and measurable strategic plan, the corporation or organization must first be able to articulate why it exists. Only then can goals, vision, and methods and standards for evaluation be created. Though the formal practice of strategic planning has generally fallen out of style in some circles (Mintzberg), the creation and use of mission statements is still widely in practice, especially within the museum field.

Mission statements act as accessible creeds to hold museums accountable to certain types of knowledge (and how that knowledge is acquired and communicated), activity (such as research, collection, exhibition), and outreach (which includes public perception, relationship building, and marketing). John W. Jacobsen highlights the fact that museums often accomplish multiple missions, but acknowledges, "The current paradigm assumes that a nonprofit museum should be focused on one mission or purpose and be evaluated on how effectively that mission is achieved" (1). Jacobsen's study seeks to develop a method of evaluation that considers museums' multiple missions, but inherent in his development is the idea that mission statements are both a measure by which museums should reflect on their own action and activity, as well as an indication for the public to understand the purpose a museum serves in

and for the community. In "The Art Museum Ecosystem: A New Alternative Model," Yuha Jung expands on this idea, stating that "They [museums] are considered active public educational institutions where relationships and networks among people are located at the center of their mission and where visitors' voices are heard and reflected in their practices" (322). Ideally, a mission statement should reflect the relationships that museums value and seek to cultivate and maintain through institutional practice.

Though the mission statement writing process is one that includes many voices and perspectives, and must consider a variety of underpinning theoretical frameworks, its enactment is one of praxis. Jacobsen observes that, "In practical terms, museum management needs to think of their purposes, combined with their desired impacts, as ends, even if others value them as means for them to get to some greater end, such as better communities and more fulfilled citizens" (10). The purpose as outlined in a mission statement should provide clear outcomes that the museum works towards, and those outcomes should, to some extent, be an end. The practical execution of an institutional mission means that there should be some achievable, measurable goal to reach. That is not to say that those goals should not also serve some greater ideal, but that daily operations and average visitor interactions do not always need to be measured against the museum's overarching social and cultural standing, or its influence on a public. Though this needn't be the case, daily operations should still

adhere to the underpinning theories that drive the museum's purpose and place in culture and society.

Besides providing clear and measurable practical outcomes, the mission statement should also provide the public with a standard by which to measure the institution when judging its value within any given community. Gilbert states that "museums are not only powerful social institutions, but ones that receive tangible societal support in the form of tax-exempt status and other funding" (133). Beyond considering the museum's esoteric value to society and culture, there is also the practical necessity to measure an institution's impact in order to justify to the public the level of publicly funded dollars the institution should receive – justifying the museum's place as a worthwhile and valuable public institution to the members of the society they exist in. Though the level of public funding is not contingent upon level of impact, this project is more concerned with the public understanding and supporting that their tax dollars might contribute, in any way, to institutions such as museums. It would be irresponsible to assume that any museum deserves to receive any level of public support without first evaluating how the museum contributes to and upholds the public it serves. Zahava Doering, in her exploration of how institutions frame their relationship to the public that utilize their services, states, "Social institutions are being called on to justify both public and private support in an increasingly competitive environment" (3). Museums must continuously and consciously justify their value to

funding sources across the board in order to retain necessary resources. The necessary status of mission statements is tautological in the sense that museums justify their value by fulfilling their mission, and therefore prove themselves worthy of funding and visitation, while requiring funding in order to properly fulfill their mission.

In "Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning," Eilean Hooper-Greenhill states that "Many museums suffer from lack of funding, lack of sufficient expertise, poor management, unclear philosophies, and from trying to do too much, too quickly, and with insufficient resources" (10). A particular aspect of what Hooper-Greenhill highlights that would provide a path to rectifying most of the other problems mentioned is the issue of "unclear philosophies." If a museum cannot clearly and concisely articulate its core values and purpose, then there is little likelihood that funding and resources, expertise, good management, or proper pacing to reach goals would come easily to the institution. Ultimately, a mission statement is supposed to provide the institution with an accessible venue by which a museum can easily articulate core values to both internal and external audiences.

Arrangement

This study is organized into five main sections. The first section provides an explanation of the methods employed for the study, specifically that of critical

discourse analysis and case study. The section also explains the scope of the data set analyzed, as well as how the data set was chosen and narrowed.

The second section provides a brief literature review. Included in the literature review is scholarship related to this type of study within the museological field, as well as sources that provide additional information on the origin of mission statements more widely.

The third section is an overview of the foundational theoretic concepts that underpin the approach to the following analysis. The theoretical foundation is used to provide insight into the nature and necessity of museum mission statements, and posits the museum as a form of media that is inherently tasked with communicating certain ideals. Though the field of museology has intellectually built upon the lineage of a variety of academic disciplines, the theoretical background provided here is one that focuses on contemporary museological discourse as a school of thought and theory in its own right.

The fourth section outlines the key points found in data collection and provides an overview of what data points were collected from each institution. The data itself shows a range of approaches in how museums present themselves linguistically through their mission statements, along with how resources are allocated. This section also provides an interpretation of the data by defining some key terms that are often connected to museum ontology.

The fifth section focuses the data further by looking specifically at three museums and provides a descriptive case study for each. This section parses out and describes how these three museums utilize non-linguistic discourse practices by looking specifically at their online presence, and determines whether or not the mission appears to be consistent with each institution's linguistic choices.

Finally, some concluding statements are provided to discuss potential next steps and comment on and emphasize the importance of the relationship between theory and praxis. Additionally, the conclusion provides a view of museums as institutions that both intentionally and unintentionally participate in various and diverse circles of discourse, as informed by the data of this study and the overarching framing of the museum as an inherently political socio-cultural institution.

Method

This project compares the language within mission statements with corresponding resource allocation based on general data pulled from institutional tax filings. It also assumes that museums develop their mission statements to closely mirror their legal obligations as outlined in their charter document, and mainly focuses on information that is easily accessible to both members of the public and the institution alike. The analysis looks at language within mission statements to

understand the main concepts that govern museum purpose and action, and specifically calls out terms that are deemed essential to museum ontology by both professionals and the public. By comparing this to the percentage of program expenses as designated on tax forms, the definition of terms used to explain resource allocation, and case studies that explore various virtual practices, this project sheds light on whether or not the medium of the museum matches the message put forth by the mission statement in practice.

This project relies on critical discourse analysis and interpretive case studies. In this case, discourse, as defined by Hansun Zhang Waring, refers specifically to “the actual use of language along with other multimodal resources (e.g., facial expression, gazes, gesture, body movements, artifacts, and the amaterial [nonmaterial] settings) to accomplish actions, negotiate identities, and construct ideologies” (8). Rather than simply looking at and defining terms used to communicate purpose by way of mission statements, this framework relies on an understanding that the museum is communicating to an audience, or audiences, through both language and action, and that that language and action is politically, socially, and culturally meaningful. Waring specifically defines discourse analysis as “the close reading of actual use of language along with other multimodal resources for the purpose of dissecting its structures and devising its meanings” (9). In the case of museum mission statements, this means close

reading of language and action in order to understand if communicated purposes and values are being carried out systemically.

Further, critical discourse analysis relies on not only discourse between parties, but also brings in aspects of power. Waring describes the practice in saying,

critical discourse analysis (CDA) is devoted to studying the relationships between language and power (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997...). Scholars in critical discourse analysis view language along with its meaning and use as inherently historical, political, and ideological. As such, their work centers on critically examining the processes through which power, dominance, discrimination, gender inequality, racism, and so on get signaled, legitimized, and naturalized through discourse, using various methods ranging from small-scale case study and ethnographic research to large-scale corpora analysis. (19)

While this project does not focus specifically on one particular issue of power within the museum, it does posit the museum writ large as a site of power and authority in terms of knowledge production and dissemination, as well as historically a tool for wider colonial and imperial systems of domination and oppression.

In order to accomplish a critical discourse analysis, a pool of data was gathered from a subset of museums in the United States (as discussed below in the Scope section). Data collected includes mission statements and financial data specifically related to expenses. Once this information was gathered, the data was pooled and specific terms were focused upon and defined, in detail, to determine the political, social, and cultural connotations of the linguistic choices made by these institutions, and how that language is or is not reflected in resource allocation.

Beyond critical discourse analysis, this project also looks at practice (what the above definitions describe as “multimodal resources”) in order to further analyze the way in which museums communicate purpose to the public they aim or claim to serve. In order to do so, three museums were chosen for descriptive case studies. In *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive and Critical Approaches*, Jerry W. Willis provides a definition of a case study as, “an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (Merriam, 1988, p. 9)” (qtd. in Willis 243). In this case, the three museums were chosen based on date of establishment and size. Three museums established in three different time periods were selected, all with similar expense budgets based on the most recent financial data available. These case studies are intended to provide an additional layer of discourse that is rooted in practice and action rather than being expressly tied to language in order to further explore if and how museums communicate purpose to audiences, as well as to determine more specifically whether or not museums are still striving to fulfill their mission during a time where they are not physically accessible.

Scope

For this project, data was collected from a very specific set of museums. These were non-collecting contemporary art museums in the United States that are not

affiliated with a university or larger institution, have a broad focus on contemporary art, regardless of media, and have a designated mission statement. The contemporary art museum space is unique in the sense that, "Contemporary art remains the most problematic area for learning and access, because of its innate newness and the often-exclusive behavior of its advocates, both curatorial and educational" (Reeve and Woollard 7). It can be argued that contemporary art is not necessarily the most accessible platform for audience and community engagement, which makes the task of reaching out to communities more significant, especially if those communities are predisposed to thinking that art, and contemporary art, is elitist or exclusionary. In addition to visitor perception, contemporary art museums also have an added layer of political discourse that other museums may not encounter in the same manner, as the artists whose work is displayed are often still living, or at least not long gone. Their voices are far more present in the ambient conversation that occurs within these museum spaces than might be present if looking at and learning from objects such as fossils, gems, or other non-contemporary works of art.

The scope of this project is one of a tightly constrained pool of data. Though the data is specific in source, it is also still a good representation of larger trends in museum discourse, especially in the area of mission statements. Though there is great variety in types of museums, there is still widespread sentiment that across the board, museums educate and exhibit. Because of this, a grouping of data to analyze mission

statements can come from a homogenous group of institutions and still be able to provide information that is valid and useful to a variety of museum types with various institutional creeds. In this sense, practical execution is not the main focus, but instead it is the desire for museums to best serve the public trust that is common and informs the impetus of this study.

The choice to focus on contemporary art museums was an aim to narrow the data pool from the tens of thousands of museums that operate in the United States. The choice to focus specifically on non-collecting museums was an acknowledgement of the fact that a non-collecting museum does not have to allocate significant funds into acquiring and maintaining collections objects, which is typically the largest area resources are dedicated towards in collecting museums. When there is no collection to care for, the question became where the museum would then dedicate their funds, and if that would allow for an increased flexibility in how program resources were allocated. Beyond this, the choice to exclude any museums that are under the umbrella of a larger institution, such as a university, was meant to take out institutions that might receive consistent funding from the parent institution that may or may not be given regardless of program efficacy, intention, or mission alignment and because of that may have different approaches to resource allocation. The choice to exclude contemporary art museums that focused on a specialized or specific area was a decision that excluded only one potential data point, whose focus on the

contemporary aspect of craft did not seem to be the main purpose of the museum, therefore making it unclear as to whether or not the museum itself qualified as a contemporary art museum at all. Finally, the museums had to have a designated mission statement, so that there would be no guessing or assumption about the true mission or purpose of the museum, as to not misrepresent any included institutions.

The pool of museums that fit these criteria came to a total of 22 museums, generally of similar size, though with a few outliers whose yearly expenses far exceed the standard. The 22 museums are what remains of all of the contemporary art museums in the United States, when the above stipulations are applied. The reasoning for these specifications was an attempt to designate a grouping of museums that were generally contextually similar, so as to avoid any extreme outliers or to complicate textual analysis in any unnecessary way.

Literature Review

Though mission statements are valuable to museums both internally and externally, there is little scholarship that critically analyzes the language of mission statements in order to reach any conclusions regarding the nature, purpose, or practice of museums. In setting forth some standard definitions of museum types, Elaine Heumann Gurian states that all museums “should choose among the many possible emphases and carefully define their vision so that their stated mission and

direction are accurately articulated and achievable” (1). Additionally, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) places significant emphasis on the value and necessity of mission statements in its *Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums*. As seen below, AAM includes mention of the mission statement throughout the document, and in every section except for one (being that of Facilities and Risk Management):

- In Public Trust and Accountability (1.7): The museum is committed to public accountability and is transparent in its mission and its operations
- In Mission and Planning (2.1): The museum has a clear understanding of its mission and communicates why it exists and who benefits as a result of its efforts
- In Leadership and Organizational Structure (3.4): The composition, qualifications, and diversity of the museum’s leadership, staff, and volunteers enable it to carry out the museum’s mission and goals
- In Collections and Stewardship (4.5): Guided by its mission, the museum provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation
- In Education and Interpretation there is not specific mention of “mission,” but does state in 5.1 that “The museum clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them.”
- In Financial Stability (6.1): The museum legally, ethically, and responsibly acquires, manages, and allocates its financial resources in a way that advances its mission.

The document also includes a second page of the formal characteristics put “In Plain English,” that very succinctly and specifically states to “Put your money where your mission is.” That is to say: according to AAM, a major voice in museum practice in the United States, in order for a museum to achieve any level of excellence as an institution, all facets of operation and resource allocation must adhere to and follow the mission.

AAM's sentiment behind the development and use of mission statements come from the corporate practice of strategic planning. According to Arnaldo C. Hax, author of *The Delta Model*, a strategic plan harkens "a change in direction, and the mission is the construct that allows us to meaningfully define and communicate the nature of that change both inside and outside of the organization" (93). Hax goes on to state that the mission statement "aggregates and describes the strategic change we intend to conduct, captures the challenges implicit to that change, and helps us to communicate them effectively to all relevant parties" (93). The mission statement acts as a clear indication of the purpose of an organization, and should be accessible and available to those within and without the institution.

Within academic museological discourse, there are two notable studies that critically analyze the language of mission statements. The first is Odile Paulus' study titled "Museums as Serigraphs or Unique Masterpieces: Do American Art Museums Display Differentiation in Their Mission Statements?" Paulus' study provides an overview as to whether American art museums are isomorphic or display differentiation based on the language used within mission statements. While there were some aspects of differentiation, it seems to be that art museums can display either isomorphism or differentiation in the goals and values communicated through mission statements, and the level of either is dependent on strategic decisions made by the institution. And, based on Paulus' data, it appears that the language utilized by

art museums is not necessarily unique to that museum type, and that language used can provide insight into more general trends in museums and mission statements.

Another study that analyzes the language used in mission statements is Lois Foreman-Wernet's "Reflections on Elitism: What Arts Organizations Communicate About Themselves." In this study, the author uses content analysis of mission statements to determine whether museums are predominately communicating cultural elitism or cultural democracy, and seeks to answer the questions: "(1) How do arts institutions express their organizational identity via mission statements? (2) How do they communicate this identity via their public communications? And (3) How do they situate themselves on the elitism-democracy continuum?" (276). Foreman-Wernet analyzed the terms used within mission statements and designated whether or not they included descriptors of either exclusion or democratic accessibility (277). The author also noted that the study did not include visitor experiences or impressions of the institution made by "media or other trusted sources" (286). The author found that "They [today's arts organizations] seem to be effectively communicating organizational missions, attempting to break down elitist barriers, and working to balance quality artwork and audience accessibility" (287).

Both Paulus and Foreman-Wernet's analyses speak to the broader impacts that mission statements have on museums and their place in society. They reveal that mission statements articulate the core values of an institution, and provide insight into

the identity and reputation that a museum is cultivating. The mission statement is a concise cross section of both theory and practice, as the mission is supposed to point to and summarize an institution's reason for being while also guiding day-to-day activity. While Paulus and Foreman-Wernet provide increased understanding as to how the mission statement impacts museum theory and identity as cultural institutions, I am instead choosing, by way of this project, to move the scope of study to the practical execution of these identities, and discuss how it reveals institutional discourse practices.

Theoretical Foundation

It is a clear and common sentiment that, for museums, "The mission is at the top and everything beneath must support it" (Jacobsen 2). The mission statement is a simple guiding framework, but the (typical) simplicity of the statement may be deceptive when considering the apparent importance of its existence and complexity of creation. The mission statement is an opportunity for the museum to articulate both the institution's most essential purpose as well as how it is carried out to communities and stakeholders.

Museum as Medium

As an organizational text, mission statements are one aspect by which the museum communicates, constituting the concept that museums can be considered a form of media, "in that they communicate messages to an audience" (Henning 305). Positing the museum as a medium furthers the reach and scope of the general mandate for museums to communicate, as outlined by Peter van Mensch (qtd in Weil 57), and centers the mission statement as a venue through which interpretation, materiality, and dialogue can occur between the institution and its public(s).

Positing the museum as a medium in its own right is not an uncommon sentiment within the field of museological literature, as Huysen states both that "museums are a mass medium" and that they are "a hybrid space somewhere between public fair and department store" (qtd in Marstine 4). Additionally, Michele Henning, in "New Media," refers to museums specifically as a cultural medium of communication (305). Hooper-Greenhill also states that "We need to consider the museum as a communicator" (12). Susan L.T. Ashley refers to museums as media in "'Engage the World': Examining Conflicts of Engagement in Public Museums," arguing "that museums must expect to be used and interpreted in the context of the present because they are public, and operate as media in the public sphere" (274). Ashley highlights a key aspect of the museum-as-medium narrative, in that not only is the institution a medium that communicates, but that it is a public one that is free to

be interpreted in whatever way the public chooses to do so, from any lens or framework, informed by any background and experience. This ability for the public to interpret the museum as a medium relies on the museum's stance as an authority on knowledge and culture, as the public will enter into interpretation with a lens of trust or distrust of this authority. Even if the museum attempts to present, interpret, and frame objects and knowledge in a particular way, the institution has little control on the interpretive lenses that the public is bringing into and on their museum experiences. Additionally, museums that cling to their historic lineage as authorities on knowledge and interpretation, whatever form that may take, may face further scrutiny by the public as they interpret the message from the medium of the museum, as the public often values and interprets based on dynamic current social, cultural, and political standards.

Marstine states that mission statements reveal that museums "aspire to unify their "publics," rather than to acknowledge multiple and shifting identities. They project an image of an ideal visitor to which the viewer is supposed to conform" (26). Mission statements collapse dynamic communities into a conglomerated public, and therefore become static statements that withstand social, cultural, and political shifts not through dialogue and specificity, but instead through vagueness. As a public institution, the museum is situated to serve and be held accountable to the public, or publics, it serves, whether it be a national citizenry, local community, visitor

populations, or other grouping of people who have right to access such public institutions. As Hooper-Greenhill emphasizes, "The function of the museum as a communicator cannot be separated from cultural issues of knowledge, power, identity, and language" (31). The museum engages with and enacts its own worldview as it communicates to the public, and the public, in turn, engages and enacts their own world view(s) as they interpret the messages received. But, instead of reflecting on and integrating public engagement and interpretation, the museum remains largely static and unshifting, as illustrated by often unchanging mission statements.

Interpretation and Materiality

As Gilbert argues, the museum has perception, and as such it communicates and mediates that perception most pointedly through the creation of texts such as mission statements that are put on display to be received by an audience. If the museum is a medium that produces texts for interpretation, then there is an assumption of some level of collective understanding that allows both internal and public audiences to interpret these texts in certain ways. Internal understanding of language found in museum mission statements will naturally vary from external, public understandings of those same terms. And, even further, subsets of both the institution and the public will also have varying interpretation from one another. Though groups can continuously be subdivided and rearticulated based on situation and circumstance,

there is still an assumption that there are communities of discourse that share some base social, cultural, and/or political understanding.

Hooper-Greenhill argues that such common understanding can be found in what Stanley Fish terms 'interpretive communities,' which "are made up of those who share interpretive strategies for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (qtd in Hooper-Greenhill 25). But, she states that "Interpretive communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural nor universal but learned" (Hooper-Greenhill 26). The methods that govern and guide the way in which an interpretive community interprets a text are not inherent to the community, and are instead learned and influenced by the community's place and perspective in culture, society, and politics. Though interpretive communities are comprised of individuals who share similar approaches to writing and reading texts, the literacy specifically regarding knowing and understanding how and why museums create mission statements, and in turn interpreting those statements, is not necessarily a priority for all communities that might encounter or engage with museums.

The idea of the museum as mediating communication is also connected to embodied experience and the material world, as the museum mediates a certain perception of the world. Henning states that "Media work on our bodies: organizing our movement and our time, soliciting different modes of attention and different

viewing positions” (305). For museums, this means that the variety of texts the institution produces has different affective consequences on both the minds and bodies of the receivers, or visitors. The museum is a medium that brings together different time scales, determines intellectual and physical pathways, and engages various types and structures of knowledge. As a medium, the museum solicits significant engagement from its audience(s), and follows McLuhan’s analysis of media, in that the main impact of media was in the “change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduced into human affairs” (qtd in Henning 305). Museums intentionally alter both the pace and pattern of engagement that people have with each other, with space, with objects, and with knowledge. The physical environment is often designed to mediate interactions such as speaking, looking, and listening, at either a slowed or heightened pace than what might be typical in everyday environments. Additionally, the museum scales interaction and engagement based on physical, intellectual, and temporal levels.

In addition to the affective nature of the museum mediating physical bodies, there is also the inherent material nature that underpins museum discourse. Marstine states that “The discourse on the museum as a market-driven industry has been shaped by Marxist theory, which looks critically at the economic and social foundations of culture” (13). Museums, more often than not, are institutions that are, or have been historically, object-centered. But, though these objects constitute the material focus of

education and exhibition endeavors, the concept of materialism within the museum field goes beyond collections and display objects. The museum must actively participate in the markets of cultural and economic capital in order to sustain itself as an institution. Henning connects concepts of materiality and embodiment in stating that,

“Material bias” refers to the orientation of specific media toward the production of certain kinds of knowledge and perceptions, and their material resistance toward the production of other kinds. In this way, media are constitutive of society, limiting what can be experienced and how it is experienced (Angus 1998). Questions of scale and temporality are not just about cognition or “psychic life” but necessarily involve bodies. To understand new media in the museum *and* the museum as a media form, we need to examine the material ways in which they organize and structure knowledge and perception through the production of bodily experiences. (305)

Museums provide specific methods of understanding and knowledge gathering and sharing, and do so predominately through physical experiences in constructed spaces. Where the museum guides and governs bodily experience and knowledge acquisition, the methods by which it does so are determined by the medium’s perception of the world, as Gilbert argued, and these perceptions are articulated most explicitly through texts such as mission statements.

Museums utilize cultural understandings of how to navigate and interpret materiality through building and exhibit design, wayfinding strategies, and by the way collections are built, cultivated, and cared for. Beyond the material needs, desires, and

literacies of human visitors and employees, the museum also mediates the material needs of objects. Of this, Weil states that “The careful shaping of a collection intended for a mission-driven use requires a more considered balance between the collection that is assembled and the museum’s ability to provide that collection with a proper level of care” (59). Objects, whether those constituting a permanent collection, or those temporarily obtained for exhibition, must also be considered in the shape and execution of museum mission. The institution must consider not only the immediate material needs of these objects, but also how they serve and are served by the mission.

Checking and Questioning

New museum discourse suggests that museums are attempting to acknowledge a diverse public and are making moves to include these diverse voices in whatever narrative the museum constructs and communicates. Gilbert states that “many museums have attempted to position themselves as positive forces for educating the public on multicultural issues in a diverse society” (126). Though this acknowledgement is crucial in reaching previously non-visiting audiences and communities, there is still the issue of the institution remaining the authority and retaining agency in political discourse regarding these diverse publics. Rather than truly acting as an informed authority on and for diverse publics, the institution may still

remain an authoritarian source of knowledge. Gilbert utilizes the concept of “loving, knowing ignorance” to illustrate how institutional authority on such matters is not only detrimental to the health of the institution, but also the wellbeing and relationships with the communities the museum serves. Gilbert borrowed “loving, knowing ignorance” from Mariana Ortega’s feminist concept of “an ignorance of the thought and experience of women of color that is accompanied by both alleged love for and alleged knowledge about them” (qtd in Gilbert 130). As applied to the museum, institutional ignorance is based on an alleged appreciation for and knowledge of minority communities and voices, but does not include space for those minority voices to be actual agents in generated discourse (Gilbert 131).

In order to avoid loving, knowing ignorance, Gilbert suggests that museums practice checking and questioning. She argues that the practice of checking and questioning “can help museums to recognize that instances of loving, knowing ignorance matter not because they pose public relations problems, but because they represent a failure of the museum’s mission” (Gilbert 138). Instead of approaching issues related to loving, knowing ignorance as marketing failures, museums should first acknowledge them as places where the mission has failed its public, not as a leisure-time institution, but as a political, publicly accessible contributor and steward of culture and knowledge. In executing its mission, a museum makes meaning for and by the public. In turn, the public also makes their own meaning as individuals, groups,

and communities. The meanings between institution and public, within different divisions of the institution, and between professional practice and theory may or may not align, and the differences that arise are ample opportunities for dialogue.

Hooper-Greenhill looks to hermeneutics as outlined by Gadamer, which posits that when entering a process of meaning-making, “A dialogue is established between the whole and the part, the past and the present, which enables continual checking and rechecking, revisiting ideas, trying new ones, and rejecting of those that do not work” (23). The mission statement written for and adopted by an institution should, beyond reflecting core purpose as designated by legal charter, reflect any such dialogue between the museum and its public(s) – but the reality is that it often does not function in any such dynamic capacity. And, as a non-legally binding text, the museum should have some level of flexibility to check and question how the mission communicates the ways it engages with the communities it serves and/or represents, though in practice it does not tend to do so. Mission statements bring together many facets that constitute the museum as a social, cultural, and political medium. They are supposed to provide space for the institution to justify its existence as a publicly funded entity, and acknowledge various aspects of materiality and dialogue that manifest through the institution’s core values and methods of operation.

Data

Of the museums included in the analysis, two terms served as markers that are viewed as integral not only to the missions of contemporary art museums, but ones that also spoke to wider trends in museum theory and practice. These were education and exhibition. These terms are defined and discussed in depth in the following sections, but first they will provide a framework by which to divide the basic data. Each mission statement can be found in full in Appendix 1.

Data Collected

The essential data, which can be accessed through the link provided in Appendix 2, pulled from each of the 22 institutions were: mission statement, total financial expenses, total program service expenses, and total expenses in categories based on program definitions as outlined on 990 tax forms from the most recent filing year. These categories are education, which include any educational programming for any age group; artists/performing arts, which include artist in residency programs or sponsoring performing arts events; exhibitions, which include the exhibit and display of non-performing art work; auxiliary services, which include café, bookstore, and giftshop services and activities; and operational expenses, which include program maintenance or operation expenses. Some institutions did not designate how their

program service expenses were divided, and so those institutional funds were left as unspecified.

Financial Data

Of the 22 museums included in the data set, six museums did not provide any specification about how their program expenses were allocated. Of the remaining 16, there are five categories found by which program services were divided. Each of the 16 museums divided program service expenses between at least two categories.

The first of these categories is education, where 14 out of 16 museums indicated spending. Education in this case includes both traditional educational programming for grade school children/young adults, as well as adult-oriented educational programming such as lecture series. The second category is arts/performing arts, and includes spending towards performance events and artist support. Six out of 16 museums indicated program expenses in this category. The third category is exhibitions, where all 16 museums allocated program funds towards this category. The fourth category is auxiliary services. Only two museums, the Aspen Art Museum and the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, had program resources allocated to this category. Both museums indicated that this category was dedicated to funding their museum shops, and the Aspen Art Museum also specified these funds were also put towards the museum café. The final category is operations, with three

museums indicating expenses in this category. The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum specifies their operations consisted of “maintenance, security, capital projects, utilities, depreciation, and operations staffing.” The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston stated that operations consisted of program marketing and communications, while the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art used these funds for “economic and commercial development” related to leasing “a portion of its buildings to commercial tenants.” The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art also had an “other” category that left 59% of its total program service expenses unspecified.

Of the 16 institutions that specified where program service expenses were allocated, the highest spending was \$13.18 million at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and the lowest from the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara with total program service expenses coming out to \$353,096. There is wide range amongst the data set, but the expense categories will be viewed as percentages of total budgets in order to make more equal comparisons between institutions. The two categories of note within the set were education and exhibition. Of the 14 museums that specified education expenses, there was an average of 20.36% of expenses dedicated to educational programming. The highest percentage from the group was at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, which dedicated 40% of its budget to educational programming. The lowest percentage was at the Museum of

Contemporary Art Denver, which dedicated only 8% of its budget to what it defined as educational programming in their tax filing. The median of this grouping is 16.5%.

The average of the 16 museums that specified exhibition as an expense category was 40.94% of total program expenses. There was greater range within this category, with the lowest spending being 14% at both the Aspen Art Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson. The highest percentage of exhibition expenses was 71% at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver. The median of this group was 43.5%.

The other notable spending category amongst this group of museums was performing arts programming and artist support. Six museums out of the 16 stated on their tax filings that program expenses were allocated towards this category. The average expenses for this category was 18.5%, with Artspace dedicating the highest percentage of funds at 40%. The lowest percentage of funds dedicated to this category was at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson with 2% of total expenses spent on this category. The median within this category was 14.5%.

Though there is a wide range represented within the categories, the financial data still shows that museums are, across the board, dedicating funding towards two major categories: education and exhibition. Though spending in these categories may not always be substantially higher than some other categories, the fact that they are both present in most (and in the case of exhibition, all) of the museums that categorize

expenses is an indicator that these are two categories that are important to the function and existence of museums.

The table below provides specifics to the above mentioned, and a link to the data set, including any quoted 990 documentation, can be found through the link provided in Appendix 2.

A Museum	A Year	A Total Expenses	A Total Program Servi...	A Educati...	A Artists/Performi...	A Exhi...	A Auxi...	A Op...	A Oth...
The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum	2017	\$3.01M	\$2.47M	\$520,685		\$1.06M		\$892,603	
Artspace	2017	\$522,081	\$360,492	\$59,628	\$144,118	\$156,746			
Aspen Art Museum	2017	\$7.73M	\$5.3M	\$1.2M		\$3.5M	\$594,780		
Atlanta Contemporary Art Museum	2017	\$560,932	\$349,498		\$97,042	\$252,456			
Blue Star Contemporary	2017	\$866,807	\$676,031 (unspecified)						
Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art	2017	\$768,804	\$657,090	\$311,350		\$345,740			
Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis	2018	\$2.67M	\$2.13M	\$560,045		\$1.57M			
Contemporary Arts Center	2017	\$4.59M	\$3.62M	\$723,954		\$2.9M			
Contemporary Arts Museum Houston	2017	\$2.83	\$2M	\$297,224		\$1.57M	\$132,967		
The Delaware Contemporary	2016	\$1.03M	\$773,545	\$355,831	\$108,296	\$309,418		\$0	
Indianapolis Contemporary	2017	\$269,771	\$264,957 (unspecified)						
Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston	2017	\$17M	\$13.18M	\$4.3M	\$1.56M	\$7.08M		\$3.08M	
Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art	2017	\$14.92M	\$12.58M		\$1.84M	\$2.73M		\$583,246	\$7.43M (...)
Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland	2017	\$4.14M	\$3.66M (unspecified)						
Museum of Contemporary Art Denver	2017	\$5.2M	\$4.12M	\$431,970		\$3.7M			
Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit	2018	\$1.82M	\$1.42M (unspecified)						
Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara	2017	\$2.1M	\$1.32M (unspecified)						
Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson	2017	\$479,435	\$353,096	\$56,318	\$7,266	\$289,512			
San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art	2017	\$733,475	\$445,640 (unspecified)						
SITE Santa Fe	2017	\$3.27M	\$2.37M	\$1.28M		\$1.08M			
Utah Museum of Contemporary Art	2016	\$962,559	\$659,278	\$229,777		\$429,501			
Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art	2017	\$2.11M	\$1.36M	\$204,554		\$1.2M			

Table 1: Data set details with specific financial data.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Within the data set, the two categories where a majority of financial resources were allocated were that of education and exhibition. Because of this, it is clear that these are two areas of major importance across these museums. This cursory financial evidence is unsurprising, as it has been established that there is a general mandate and incentive for museums to be educational in nature, both to uphold professional and cultural expectations, as well as to meet criteria as non-profit organizations. Additionally, it is also not surprising that, of the museums that specified expense breakdown, all had dedicated funds specifically for exhibition. In addition to education, exhibition is another expected practice for museums. Since such a large portion of these museums dedicate spending towards education and exhibition, it is worth looking more closely at these terms and their connotations.

Education

Within the sample set, only 11 out of the 22 museums specifically mentioned education in their mission statements, but 14 museums out of the 22 allocated funds towards educational programming. This is significant when also accounting for the fact that six of the 22 institutions that did not specify how their program expenses were divided. In AAM's *Alliance Reference Guide: Developing a Mission Statement*, the

organization states that a required element of a mission statement is that it be “educational in scope,” which reflects AAM’s sentiment that museums are predominately spaces of education. Not only must the statement itself be informative, but it must also indicate and integrate the museum’s dedication to educating the public. Additionally, the IRS indicates that in order for an organization to qualify as non-profit, it must operate “exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, testing for public safety, literary, educational, or other specified purposes” (“Exempt Organization Types”). Because of this, there is a question as to why the term “education” is not explicitly stated in more than half of the mission statements.

The disparity between institutions that allocate education-specific resources, and those that specifically include mention of education within mission statements seems to indicate that despite what the mission statements might say, education is still a valuable tenant of the museum. Museums that specifically mentioned education in their mission statements and specified how program expenses were divided listed an average of 18% of their expenses as education related activities. This number was also mirrored in the wider sample – the 14 museums that had educational activities as a category in the program expense section of their 990 also had average of 18% of their total expenses dedicated to education. Interestingly, the museum that dedicated the highest percentage of total expenses on education was the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, with 40% of their expenses for the year being put towards

education. Boulder's mission states that the museum "is a catalyst for creative experiences through the exploration of significant art of our time," and does not include any mention at all of education, or even general programming. Despite this, I argue that the Boulder Museum of Contemporary art is still valuing education in their mission statement, but is framing it in a way that recognizes a shift in what qualifies as educational in the museum space.

This shift in the educational mandate as understood by museums is acknowledged by scholars such as Hooper-Greenhill, who notes that in the past, "Education was understood as a process of imparting information and, through this, values, such as to constitute the subject as an ideal citizen. One of the characteristics of museum education during this period was a moral, sometimes proselytising [sic] dimension" (17). Old museum (and educational) practice would indicate that the museum was an absolute authority of the knowledge it purveyed, and that visitors were unquestioning vessels to be filled with that knowledge. But, now, in contemporary museum practice, the mandate to educate has taken on a new tone that redefines the relationship between institution and individual. Doering states that "An educational mission implies a relationship with visitors akin to that of "hosts" and "guests," in which museums not only are more accommodating to visitors, but also take some responsibility for what happens to them" (3). In this sense, education is less of a one-way conversation, and more of a discourse in which both parties, while still on

unequal footing, can facilitate and mediate meaning-making by and through one another.

If this is the current understanding of education, in both formal and informal learning environments, then why is it not something that is included and specifically mentioned in all mission statements? It would seem that nearly every activity a museum engages in would be one with an educational focus, which would indicate that it could be argued that most resource allocation could be designated as educational. Henning argues that “we can see that the priority of the object in museums has been declining for some time” and that there is “an increased emphasis on information and communication” (306). Here, Henning is referring to a similar idea of the museum’s essential functions as outlined by van Mensch, where “communication” includes interpretation and exhibition, and thus includes education theory and practice. Additionally, if AAM pushes that education is a primary function of the museum, then why is it that the percentage of program funds put towards programming specifically labeled as “education” is so significantly lower than those put towards program services such as exhibition?

I would argue that the educational mission of museums is not one that can only be classified and assessed through programs specifically designated as education. This is especially pertinent when most ‘educational’ programming in many institutions is only in reference to that serving grade school audiences. Even the museums included

in the data set for this analysis often had educational programming for adult audiences separate from what they designated 'education' in their tax filings. The educational mission of museums happens throughout the institution, and cannot be so limited in its definition or understanding. Jung states that "learning takes place through a social learning web, immersed in living through interacting and communicating with various recourses within social environments" (323). Just receiving communication through the medium of the museum is allowing space for a learning environment, whether or not the institution or the individual are conscious of that space.

This understanding and expectation of learning through the museum indicates that there is a necessary focus on experience – rather than viewing the museum as a classroom, it is instead a learning space that merges a variety of experiential aspects in order to captivate/engage/retain/educate audiences. Thus, the museum becomes a space of active discourse and meaning-making on behalf of both the institution and the visitor. Just as experience is a term that occurs often in the sampled mission statements, creativity (and its subsequent conjugations), is also a notable term that fits nicely into the educational mandate of a contemporary art museum. It is not much of a leap to pair creative and educational experiences together in such an environment, as the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art did in their mission statement, and provides an additional point of access to interpret where a museum might be

communicating its educational mandate with less formal, grade-school related connotations.

Rather than specifically looking to education as the catch-all term to articulate museum mission and mandate, I would instead argue that learning may be a more suitable term that better articulates what a museum means when thinking of education. Much like education, learning is a term that has many connotations among various academic, philosophic, and public circles. But, when viewing the museum as a medium that communicates its perception of the world, 'learning' is less connected to established formal practices that are external to the museum as 'education' is. Education as a formal field of study and practice is deeply situated in the world of formal education, and the museum is very specifically and intentionally aligned with informal education. The distinction between the two is not one that would necessarily carry over to a majority of audiences. To a visitor, it may seem more appealing to go to a museum to learn, rather than be educated.

The Learning in Informal and Formal Environments Center (LIFE Center) provides a learning framework that situates learning as life-long, life-wide, and life-deep. They state that "most of the learning that occurs across the life span takes places [sic] in informal environments" and that "people spend the majority of their time from infancy to adulthood in informal learning settings" (9). It is notable that these informal settings are not referred to as educational settings, but as learning

settings. They are not spaces where learning is obligatory but are instead spaces where the opportunity to learn is available, whether an individual chooses to engage or not. The LIFE Center also outlines four principles of learning:

1. Learning is situated in broad socio-economic and historical context and is mediated by local cultural practices and perspectives.
2. Learning takes place not only in school but also in the multiple contexts and valued practices of everyday lives across the life span.
3. All learners need multiple sources of support from a variety of institutions to promote their personal and intellectual development.
4. Learning is facilitated when learners are encouraged to use their home and community language resources as a basis for expanding their linguistic repertoires. (5)

Falk and Dierking also state in the “Free-Choice Learner’s Bill of Rights” that free-choice lifelong learners should have,

1. access to the learning resources of all parts of the community;
2. a breadth and depth of educational opportunity available to them sufficient to satisfy personal curiosity, a need to know, and to ensure a full and satisfying life;
3. opportunities to learn in supportive and educationally reinforcing social and cultural environments;
4. access to age-appropriate exploration and mastery learning opportunities at every developmental stage of life. (134)

These perspectives on learning mirror what I see as a larger trend in museum discourse, and which has been discussed in sections above, in that the museum must be situated as an institution that engages in social, cultural, and political discourses, and is therefore an institution that engages with and serves diverse publics. The museum may not be the only learning environment an individual chooses to engage

with, but it is one of many that can provide unique learning experiences through a variety of media and methods. The museum should not be, and in most cases is not, limited by the reach of an education department to serve as a space for learning. All sections and levels of the museum serve to enact the mandate of a museum to provide opportunities to learn.

As mentioned above, of 18% of total expenses dedicated to educational programming is not an insignificant figure to go by when looking at resource allocation. But, when considering the wider understanding and consequences of museums as institutions that educate, the number seems low. Rather than taking that number at face value, professionals and publics alike should consider alternative ways that education and learning can be communicated and encouraged within museum spaces, and recognize that the educational mission of museums extends far beyond what might be specifically designated as an educational activity or process in a tax document. Education within museum spaces must go beyond arbitrary boundaries of pedagogy and audience age, and must consider the underlying mandate of museums to educate the public through a variety of means and methods. AAM's *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* states that

Excellence and Equity is based on an expanded notion of public service and education as a museum-wide endeavor that involves trustee, staff, and volunteer values and attitudes; exhibitions; public and school programs; publications; public relations efforts; research; decisions about the physical environment of the museum; and the choices about collecting and preserving.

These elements are among the many that shape the educational messages museums convey to the public. (qtd in Gilbert 125)

The educational mission as outlined in various mission statements is not one that is limited by the categories that are provided when justifying expense allocation on tax documents. Here, the mission language and the institutional action are somewhat at odds, as the language might be informed by this wider understanding, whilst spending descriptions function on a more practical, immediate level. Whereas museums may be allocating resources to educational programming, it may be beneficial to the public and the institution to make clearer the ways in which, as described by AAM, all aspects of the museum, at all levels, participate in fulfilling a mission to educate.

Exhibition

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines exhibition as “the result of the action of displaying something, as well as the whole of that which is displayed, and the place where it is displayed” (35). The council also states that “exhibitions are seen today as one of the main functions of the museum” (36). Within this textual analysis, exhibition has the most practical and explicit connotation between the two terms pulled from mission statements. And, looking only at institutions that do not have the responsibility to care for collections objects, the numbers reflect that this is the primary focus of these museums, with 16 of the 22 museums dedicating an average of 41% of total expenses to exhibition. Though these museums do not have a

collection to care for, the act of exhibiting is generally a function of museums across the board, as public access to museum collections and knowledge is most often done through exhibition.

Of exhibitions, ICOM also states that “exhibition areas are defined not only by the container and the contents but also by the users – visitors and museum professionals – that is to say the people who enter this specific area and share in the general experience of the other visitors at the exhibition” (35). This definition identified that beyond method of display, a high value aspect of exhibition is experience, and specifically, visitor experience. As stated in the previous section, experience is not an uncommon term among this sample of museums, and it is difficult to conceptualize an exhibition without also ruminating upon the experiential aspects that a visitor might engage with or participate in. The idea of closely tying exhibition and experience, and even education, is valuable in that it provides activity and agency to both parties involved – the exhibitor and the observer/visitor/participant. The motivation to provide a meaningful experience, to whatever capacity that may be, opens up a space for exchange between institution and individual, and inherently lends some authority to the individual who is engaging in meaning-making and judging their experience through their own lens and expectation.

Exhibitions are not only about what is on display, or where those objects are displayed, but also about the people that interact with these displays and the

relationships they build, however brief, with one another as well as with the object and the venue. It is unsurprising that of the contemporary art museums looked at, 14 of the 22 explicitly stated that exhibition, or showing art, was part of their mission. But, it is also interesting to note that 10 of those 14 museums also explicitly included education as a main aspect of their mission. While exhibits are listed separately from education when describing program service expense allocation, exhibits might be the primary venue where learning happens for most visitors. Interactions with exhibited material and accompanying labels offer a wealth of knowledge and understanding, and are most often accessible to the widest range of visitors.

When considering the role of exhibits within a museum mission statement, it would not be remiss to consider exhibits at least partially under the umbrella of an institution's educational mission, as well. As visitors enter museum spaces, "many visitors are primed to believe in the validity of both the exhibit and the institution" (Gilbert 126). Visitors often enter museums spaces with an underlying belief that the institution is a built learning environment, and that the objects on display, along with their interpretation, are providing access to knowledge that is vetted by the museum, a culturally trusted institution. Whether or not an exhibit is under the purview of whatever museum education department that may exist, and whether or not a primary goal of the exhibit is to educate, visitors will still have the opportunity to engage with an environment in which they might learn. Knowledge gained might be factual or

experiential knowledge, and might contribute to life-long, life-deep, or life-wide learning. Regardless, Gilbert argues that “visitors find multiple kinds of meaning in their museum experiences” (127), and that meaning more than likely contributes to some level of learning, whether or not the learning experience begins and ends in the museum.

The act of meaning making is one that can occur naturally in an exhibit space. Even though the museum is mediating what kind and level of knowledge is communicated within these spaces, visitors are still able to bring in their own strategies from the interpretive communities they belong to in order to make sense of, engage and interact with the objects and information on display. Doering states that “When visitors are viewed as “meaning makers” the museum’s educational role shifts from providing authoritative interpretation to facilitating the varied interpretive activities of visitors and encouraging dialogue and negotiating among those different views” (5). Reframing exhibits to be not only spaces of display, but also opportunities for learning, allows visitors increased agency within the museum as meaning makers, and thus opens up space for dialogue. Despite the fact that exhibition is an opportune and obvious area for education to take place, there is no clear link between the two when looking at museum mission statements. It may be still that concepts of education, and the authorities that put those concepts into museum practice, are limiting the ability of the institution to clearly communicate purpose in an effective

manner. Perhaps, if 'learning' replaced 'education' in the discourse, there would be more room to include a variety of museum practice within the conversation of museum ontology, rather than so strictly sequestering action into best-fit terms that may or may not adequately communicate purpose and intention.

Case Studies

The following case studies look at three museums that were established at three different time periods. The first contemporary art museum was established in 1931, and so the time periods for this study are: 1930-1960, 1961-1990, and 1991-2020. The group of museums was divided by age of establishment to have some marker of comparison, to see if institutional age might show any trends as to the effectiveness of their response and practice in this time of global pandemic. Additionally, from those time periods, museums were chosen based on size, specifically that of each institution total expense budget. The goal here was to make sure that one museum was not far exceeding others in resources, and therefore be able to do significantly more with those resources.

The three museums are the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, established in 1948 with total expenses at \$2.83M; the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara, established in 1976 with \$2.1M total expenses; and the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, established in 2006, with total expenses at \$1.82M. Coincidentally, each of

the selected museums have equally rich and robust mission statements, as well as seemingly well-rounded online presences. These case studies each look specifically at the discourse generated through each museum's website and social media. At this juncture, rather than looking specifically at linguistic markers as the above section did, the case studies focus primarily on the multimodal resources that the organizations do or do not utilize to engage with the public. Through this, an assessment will be made as to whether or not the museum is currently active in mission fulfilment, using the mission statement as the standard.

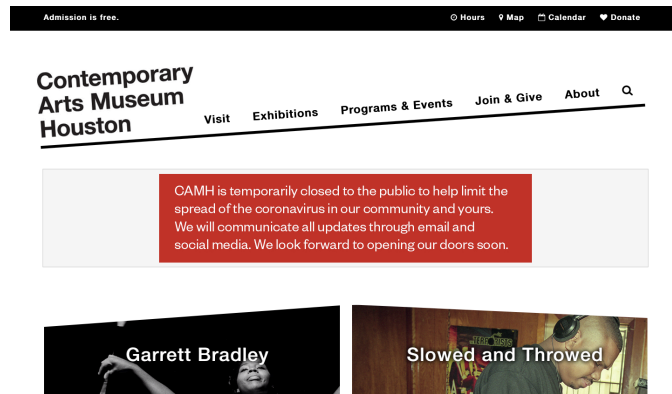
Case #1: The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's (CAMH) mission statement, as stated on their website, is: "Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally" (camh.org). Some key terms included in this statement are exhibition, and the related term presents, along with educate and the related terms programming, and thought-provoking. CAMH is clearly communicating an intention to integrate and fulfill a mission centered largely around education and exhibition. Additional key terms in this statement also include extraordinary and inspire. Not only does the mission statement communicate ontological basics related

to museum practice, but it goes beyond that to communicate an intention to facilitate and mediate meaningful experiences that could transcend the museum visit.

The first point of contact that the museum has online is their website (camh.org). Initially notable on their homepage is the statement at the top that “admission is free.” While this does not specifically relate to anything explicitly mentioned in the mission statement, it does indicate a desire for the institution to be accessible and equitable, which is a tenet of lifelong free-choice learning as provided by Falk and Dierking. The website also has a banner with an update about the state of the museum during the pandemic. The banner states that “CAMH is temporarily closed to the public to help limit the spread of the coronavirus in our community and yours. We will continue all updates through email and social media. We look forward to opening our doors soon.” The website also has cards for featured exhibits with basic background information and an option to click through for additional information and resources. There are also smaller cards with links to virtual tours, Instagram takeovers, calls for engagement (such as an activity for an at-home photoshoot), and artist interviews hosted on the museum’s Instagram TV (IGTV) and YouTube channels. There is also a link to support the museum either by donation or joining as a member, as well as links out to the museum’s various social media pages. The museum also has a “museum from home” page that is accessible through a pop-up on the homepage,

and it contains the same events promoted in the calendar on the home page, as well as links to previous virtual events.



Figures 1 and 2: Screen captures of camh.org – the left shows the pop-up when the website first launches, the right shows the top of the homepage.

CAMH has four social media channels, listed in the order they are linked to on the museum’s website: @camhouston on Instagram, @thecamh on Facebook, @camhouston on Twitter, and as Contemporary Arts Museum Houston on YouTube. CAMH’s Instagram page includes artist takeovers and interviews, features of exhibited pieces, museum events, and social/community engagement. There are several notable posts in which the museum directly engages with its community. One of these is the post regarding the murder of George Floyd, in which the museum not only acknowledges the larger issues surrounding this event, but also Floyd’s place in the

Houston community. Here, the museum is explicitly engaging with both national and international discourse while also providing a unique contribution that further educates audiences about this situation – specifically by humanizing this tragedy through the mention George Floyd’s active involvement in the Houston hip-hop community.

CAMH’s Facebook page seems to post very similar content as their Instagram, with the addition of calendar events, which utilizes capabilities unique to the platform that are unavailable on Instagram. Additionally, the Facebook page features a pinned post about building updates being made during the current closure. The museum’s Twitter also features the same pinned announcement that is on the Facebook page, while also featuring exhibition-related tweets and re-tweets, as well as an emphasis on art/artists and social/cultural engagement. CAMH’s YouTube page features a promo video titled “CAMH’s Community Impact,” and highlights that the museum is free, has a teen council, hosts lectures and performances, promotes local artists and musicians, emphasizes collaboration and diversity, and features individuals stating that CAMH is “inclusive, accessible, home, inspiring, passionate, unafraid.” The YouTube channel has also organized some videos into the playlists CAMH Lectures/Discussions, CMH Performance, and CAMH Trailers & Previews.

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston makes productive and effective use of the unique features of each platform. Though the museum may not currently be

physically accessible, it provides several points of entry to audiences online. And, because the museum has made content available online, it is able to effectively work towards fulfilling the aspect of its mission to reach audiences both “nationally and internationally.” But, one point of contention this level of virtual engagement brings about is the fact that the previously physically accessible and free museum space is no longer accessible to those visitors who might not have consistent or reliable access to digital resources, or who might not be able to effectively engage with the institution on this level for whatever reason. This museum, along with the other museums included in these case studies, as well as museums across the field during this time, may be striving to reach audiences virtually, but it is unclear how much consideration is given to those potential visitors who may not have equitable access to digital resources and who, arguably, might benefit most from the resources that a free museum might provide by and through its physical space.

Case #2: Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara

The Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara’s (MCASB) mission statement reads: “Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara advances creativity and inspires critical thinking through meaningful engagement with the art of our time” (mcasantabarbara.org). It is notable that this mission statement makes no explicit mention of either education or exhibition. Though this is the case, there is use of

learning related language such as advancing creativity and inspiring critical thinking, as well as exhibition related language such as meaningful engagement, which specifically references a type of experience the museum hopes to mediate, presumably through exhibition and/or programming.



MCASB WILL RE-OPEN SOON. PLEASE CHECK BACK FOR UPDATES.



<p>Hours</p> <p>Sunday: Closed Monday: Closed Tuesday: Closed Wednesday: Closed Thursday: Closed Friday: Closed Saturday: Closed</p> <p>Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara is the premier venue for contemporary art between Los Angeles and San Francisco. MCASB advances creativity and inspires critical thinking through meaningful engagement with the art of our time.</p> <p>Subscribe to our mailing list to stay in the know about upcoming events and exhibitions.</p>	 <p>MCASB is a non-collecting contemporary art museum. Exhibitions at the Main Space location rotate three times annually and are typically on view for fourteen weeks. Visitors are encouraged to check the exhibition calendar to ensure a visit when the Museum is open to the public.</p> <p>MORE INFO ></p>	 <p>MCASB focuses on audience development and visitor experience through four platforms of engagement: Community, Diversity, Experimentation, and Arts Outreach.</p> <p>MORE INFO ></p>
	 <p>MCASB membership infuses culture and community with access to groundbreaking exhibitions and innovative programming with artists, curators, and fellow art enthusiasts. Help us meet our mission to provide the most compelling art of our time and continue the positive arts impact on our community at home and around the world.</p> <p>MORE INFO ></p>	

Figure 3: Screen capture of mcasantabarbara.org that shows the mission statement repeated in the header image as well as under the museum hours.

MCASB’s website opens with a pop-up prompt to join their mailing list. Then, once that is passed, the mission statement is the first image seen on a rotating deck at the top of the homepage. This is notable, as it is uncommon to see the mission statement highlighted so immediately on the website. Other images in this rotating deck include a closure notice due to the pandemic, an exhibition promotion, an

internship promotion, and an opportunity to become a member. Under these initial images is a section with the museum hours along with cards that state, “visit,” “engage,” and “support” that link to more information on each of these topics. Within this section, immediately under where the hours are listed, the mission statement is once again included in a brief statement of purpose. The bottom of the homepage lists news and press releases. There are currently no events listed on the website, virtual or otherwise.

The museum has four social media channels, all found under the @mcasantabarbara handle. These are discussed in the same order they are provided on the website. MCASB’s Facebook includes posts that are engaging with social and cultural discourse, such as a Black Lives Matter solidarity post including the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter, #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd, #JusticeForAhmaudArbery, and #JusticeForBreonnaTaylor. Additionally, the museum also posted about two new local murals in downtown Santa Barbara addressing current events, and also included a statement in solidarity with “Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and all people of color” and also takes an explicitly anti-racist stance. Another notable post is for International Museum Day. This post states that “MCASB is here to serve our audience and community, and we couldn’t do any of this without you and your support. We are excited for the day that we get to celebrate together in person! @ Museum of

Contemporary Art Santa Barbara.” Other posts on the page are promoting unaffiliated digital events and artist work.

MCASB’s other social media channels are generally quiet. The museum’s Twitter has not made any new posts after announcing the museum’s closure on March 14th. The YouTube channel mostly includes lectures/discussions and exhibition highlights, and does not have a promo video or playlists. The museum’s Instagram page contains many of the same or similar posts as to what is found on their Facebook page, and seems to post one to two posts per week.

Generally, the museum does not seem to be well equipped or does not seem invested in its digital strategies. It would seem that MCASB’s mission has not been translated in ways that allow for mission fulfillment during a time when the physical museum space is unavailable to visitors. While CAMH’s strategy makes issues surrounding digital access and availability more apparent, MCASB’s case brings to the fore the material constraints surrounding museum practice. It would seem that the mission for “meaningful engagement with the art of our time” is much more difficult to facilitate for this institution when that engagement must be mediated within a virtual space.

Case #3: Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit

The Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit's (MOCAD) mission statement reads: "MOCAD is where adventurous minds encounter the best in contemporary visual, literary, music, and performing arts. A responsive center for diverse audiences, MOCAD presents art that contextualizes, interprets, educates and expands culture, pushing us to the edges of contemporary experience" (mocadetroit.org). Like the previous cases, the mission statement includes several notable terms. These terms include education related terms such as adventurous minds, contextualizes, interprets, and educates. There are also exhibit related terms such as encounter, presents, and experience. Other notable terms are diverse audiences, expands culture, and the use of "us." These few terms show investment in community, as each term reaches beyond the confines of the museum space and out into the culture the institution is situated in and participates with.

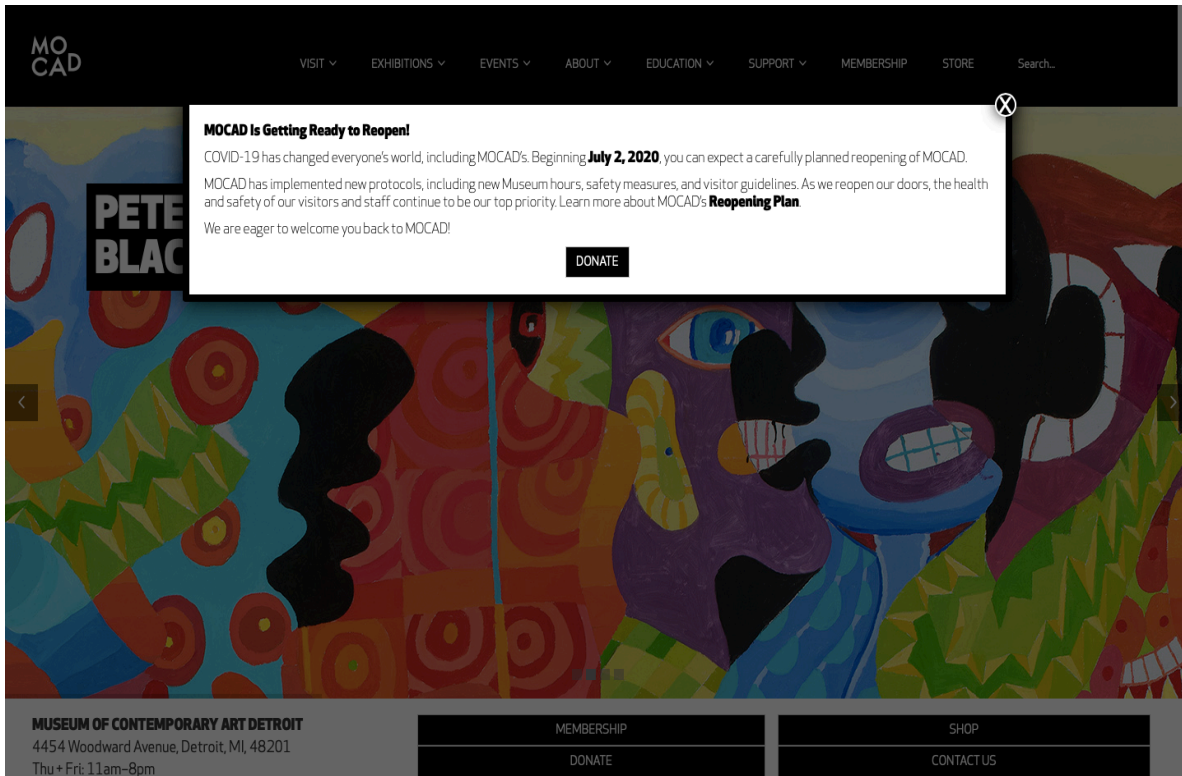


Figure 4: Screen capture of mocadetroit.org that shows the pop-up window with updated messaging over the homepage.

The museum's website opens with a pop-up window that updates with new information. For example, in early May of 2020, the pop-up provided links to the museum's online exhibition series, the museum's online shop, a link to a fundraiser for artists, and the spring exhibition schedule. The pop-up was updated in June of 2020 to provide a link to the museum's reopening plan for July 2nd, 2020, along with a link to donate. Once passed the popup, there is a rotating deck at the top of the homepage that includes promotion for the MOCAD future fund and exhibitions opening when the museum reopens. Below this, there are events listed, which at the time of writing only include a virtual artist talk. Below events, there is a section that

provides links for “ways to support MOCAD.” Then, there is a link for MOCAD membership, and at the bottom is a section that links to the Ford Curatorial Fellow Blog.

MOCAD, as the previous cases, has four social media channels, and are here discussed in the order in which they are listed on the museum’s website. On Facebook, the museum is @MOCADetroit, on YouTube they are under Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit – MOCAD, on Instagram the museum has the same handle as Facebook, and the museum’s Twitter handle is @MOCAD. The Facebook page features a pinned post for artist support, and mostly features other posts about artist support, artists’ work, and virtual events. The YouTube channel features a promo video on an artist’s project, and has several categories of video playlists – lectures, artist talks/discussions, DEPE (Department of Education and Public Engagement) space, and community. The YouTube channel has also become far more active with uploads in the months of May and June, coinciding with prolonged closure due to the pandemic. The museum’s Instagram page features unique posts that vary from those featured on Facebook, and include announcements, highlights new exhibitions for when the museum reopens, features of artists and artwork, and promotes items in the museum store. Additionally, the Instagram also features engaging posts such as movie recommendations from the museum’s teen council, and culturally engaging posts such as those in solidarity with the BLM movement and covid-related commentary. The

museum's Twitter account is comprised mostly of links to Instagram posts, with some feature of virtual events and announcements.

MOCAD seems to have a fairly established online presence. In recent times, it would appear that the museum is utilizing their social media presence to increase engagement while the museum is closed due to the pandemic, which fits with the mission mandate to be a "responsive center." But, it does not appear that this online activity necessarily "pushes us to the edges of contemporary experience." In fact, the museum has a fairly standard online presence that is neither poor nor exceptional in the field.

Conclusion

This project has aimed to critically analyze the mission statements of a set of museums in order to determine to what degree those mission statements accurately, succinctly and critically portray museum purpose and practice to public audiences. This was done by analyzing the discourse of mission statements and financial data of 22 institutions, as well as the online presence of three institutions. The theoretical framework by which these markers were analyzed posits the museum as a materialist medium that interprets and is simultaneously interpreted by the public it serves. And, in order to avoid Gilbert's concept of "loving, knowing ignorance," the museum must

also engage in active reflection practices to uphold public trust and fulfill their self-declared missions. The analysis of mission statements from the pool of museums chosen for this study revealed that two terms seemed important markers for the group: education and exhibition. The financial data also reflected that these were two valuable practices for these museums, as there were substantial expenses dedicated to both categories. The case studies provided a practical perspective of how missions are (or are not) carried out when museums are physically inaccessible to audiences.

Regardless of whether or not each museum from the case studies had an active online presence, they all were still driven by strong institutional voices, and online updates or posts, when related to museum events, tied back to material practices that often had explicit or implicit relation to education, exhibition, or both. The case studies provided insight into the ways each museum was or was not able to bring mission fulfillment into the unique situation caused by the current pandemic.

However, the comparison of mission statements to resource allocation and museum practice revealed that institutions might consider taking the time to reflect on whether or not their theoretical and practical definitions of terms such as education and exhibition are in alignment, and whether or not any alignment or misalignment between the two would indicate disparities or successes in mission fulfillment. The results found from this study show that there is some general alignment between mission statements and museum discourse practices that indicate mission alignment

and fulfillment, but there is no clear generalizable cursory measure or indication as to whether or not that is truly the case. Correlations between mission statements, spending, and online presence were found, especially in the specific categories of education and exhibition, but further investigation would need to be done to parse out any ambiguity that exists between what museums say they are doing or hope to do, what they are actually doing, and what the public perceives the museum to be doing. Hooper-Greenhill states that "Museums today have the opportunity to push at existing borders, to change current relationships, to manipulate and break down old orthodoxies, to enable a broader, more inclusive approach to a more inclusive society" (31). Based on financial data and discourse practices, the museums included in this study generally seemed to be fulfilling their missions, but factors such as individual museum history and internal politics, tax requirements, and public perception and participation make it unclear as to whether these indicators are truly able to mark success. Because of this, while this thesis was able to provide a theoretical framework by which to start thinking of discourse practices and mission fulfillment, along with practical examples of how the framework might be applied, it is not able to unambiguously determine whether or not mission statements accurately, succinctly and critically portray museum purpose and practice to public audiences. The act of determining the success of a mission statement is just as complex as the social, cultural, and political networks that museums are inherently entangled in, and,

ultimately, it is up to purveyors of museum thought and practice to utilize methods that not only measure the success of mission-driven activity, but adhere to the standards that uphold and perpetuate the mission itself.

The fundamental ideals articulated by mission statements are ones that should be emphasized to the public so that the public is not only informed of the institution's essential reason for being, but also so that the public might also hold the institution accountable. As Doering states, "A museum that is accountable to visitors for certain kinds of experiences will provide settings that support and enhance those experiences and will remove barriers or constraints that interfere with or detract from making them" (6). The museum mission statement is a concise touchpoint not only for the museum to communicate its values, but should also be made available so that the public might begin to engage in a discourse with the institution that is meaningful and provides space for the museum to reflect on whether or not they are fulfilling that mission. Especially during this time of global pandemic and national unrest, the museum is situated to act as an institution that engages with and supports the communities it serves and represents. As discussions of institutional equity, equality, and justice are renewed by the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, it is an opportune time for museums to address core values and recognize that inclusive and accessible missions are more than just statements – they are active discourse practices that uphold public trust. It is my hope that mission statements become not just an

operational credence, but a space for reflection and action on behalf of both the institution and the public.

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Appendix 1 – Mission Statements

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum advances creative thinking by connecting today's artists with individuals and communities in unexpected and stimulating ways.

Artspace, New Haven, Connecticut

To catalyze artistic activities; connect contemporary artists, audiences, and resources; and to enrich art experiences and activate art spaces.

Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, Colorado

The Aspen Art Museum is a non-collecting institution presenting the newest, most important evolutions in international contemporary art. Our Innovative and timely exhibitions, education and public programs, immersive activities, and community happenings actively engage audiences in thought-provoking experiences of art, culture, and society.

Atlanta Contemporary Art Museum, Atlanta, Georgia

Atlanta Contemporary engages the public through the creation, presentation and advancement of contemporary art.

Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, Texas

To inspire the creative genius in us all by nurturing artists through innovative contemporary art.

Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, Colorado

Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art is a catalyst for creative experiences through the exploration of significant art of our time.

Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis works to enrich lives and inspire curiosity, creativity, and learning through experiences with contemporary art. Our mission is to create meaningful engagement with the most relevant and innovative art being made today. We are a welcome space, free to all.

Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio

Art and the creative process belong to all people. The CAC provides experiences through exhibitions and performances as well as educational and outreach programs, to engage and interact with the art, artists, and ideas of our time. Working with our regional community of visitors, patrons, and partners, and with our global community of artists and institutions, we explore and celebrate the unfolding landscape of art and expression.

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston, Texas

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston presents extraordinary, thought-provoking arts programming and exhibitions to educate and inspire audiences nationally and internationally.

The Delaware Contemporary, Wilmington, Delaware

The Delaware Contemporary is an art space that infuses contemporary art and creativity into our community through compelling exhibitions, dynamic educational experiences, and access to the artistic process.

Indianapolis Contemporary, Indianapolis, Indiana

Indianapolis Contemporary's mission is to connect people to inspiring and innovative art of our time, with an emphasis on work that is aesthetically compelling, conceptually rigorous, and socially impactful. Our work takes four approaches: Exhibitions, Programs, Abstract, and Network. We support the needs of artists and audiences through an ongoing commitment to exceptional quality of contemporary art presentation; exceptional audience experiences; meaningful opportunities for local artists to expand their practice; and thoughtful connections between Indianapolis and international communities.

Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Boston, Massachusetts

The Institute of Contemporary Art strives to share the pleasures of reflection, inspiration, provocation, and imagination that contemporary art offers through public access to art, artists, and the creative process.

Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, Massachusetts

Through innovative collaborations, MASS MoCA helps artists and their supporters create and show important new work, bringing to our visitors bold visual and performing art in all stages of production, while also creating a stimulating center of creativity and commerce that brings life and economic vibrancy to its hometown.

Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, Cleveland, Ohio

Unique and dynamic, moCa Cleveland advances the visual art of our time. We challenge, inspire, and teach a wide range of audiences in order to push the boundaries of innovation, creativity and exploration through exhibitions, publications, and programming.

Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Denver, Colorado

The Museum of Contemporary Art Denver (MCA Denver) explores the art and culture of our time through rotating exhibitions and public educational programs. Featuring regional, national and international artists, MCA Denver offers a wide range of exhibitions promoting creative experimentation with art and ideas. Through adult and youth education programs and other creative events, the museum serves as an innovative forum for a culturally engaged community.

Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Detroit, Michigan

MOCAD is where adventurous minds encounter the best in contemporary visual, literary, music, and performing arts. A responsive center for diverse audiences, MOCAD presents art that contextualizes, interprets, educates and expands culture, pushing us to the edges of contemporary experience.

Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California

Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara advances creativity and inspires critical thinking through meaningful engagement with the art of our time.

Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson, Tucson, Arizona

MOCA Tucson inspires new ways of thinking through the cultivation, exhibition, and interpretation of contemporary art.

San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, California

The San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) is an energetic art space located in downtown San Jose dedicated to promoting greater awareness, understanding and appreciation of contemporary art. The ICA's ongoing series of site-specific installations makes it a destination for experiencing unique, immersive exhibitions that transform the gallery and engage, delight and inspire our visitors.

SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, New Mexico

SITE Santa Fe nurtures innovation, discovery, and inspiration through the art of today.

Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, Salt Lake City, Utah

The Utah Museum of Contemporary Art (UMOCA) is Utah's only museum solely devoted to contemporary arts and culture. Through our exhibitions and programs, we engage with social issues, provide a platform for dialogue, and create a nurturing space for artists to work and develop, as we advance and support the contemporary arts community in Utah.

Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, Virginia Beach, Virginia

The Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art is a non-profit institution which exists to foster awareness, exploration, and understanding of the significant art of our time. Through excellence and diversity in our changing exhibitions and educational programming, MOCA stimulates critical thinking and dialogue throughout the Hampton Roads community.

Appendix 2 – Link to Data Set

Complete data set recorded and hosted on Airtable:
<https://airtable.com/shrpdWB48QzoOMNbt>