

**Voices in Exhibition Content:**

**The use of content design and interpretation to create effective ways to  
promote social change, civic dialogue and community collaboration**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of my thesis is to show how a museum can effectively promote social change, civic dialogue, and community collaboration through the use of effective content design and interpretation of an exhibition. In researching what the public desires in an institution and how a museum can be a tool for creating social change, I sought out successful examples of museums that have created this change through dialogue and collaboration. I focus primarily on the content design and interpretation of their storytelling. Each museum varies as to how they approached their exhibitions, but all have had positive and successful results. As museums act as beacons of culture, places for scientific learning, places to discover the past, and places to discover beauty in artwork, they can also act as catalysts for a greater purpose in our society. Allowing visitors to experience new points of view, critically think, and participate in dialogue and collaborations, the museum becomes an active member of the community that strives to change the way our world thinks and acts.

## **Dedication**

I would like to thank several people and organizations for helping with my journey. My decision to pursue my graduate school degree was not an easy decision, but well worth the time and energy.

-- To my parents for allowing me to continue my education with their overwhelming support and love. Your patience will always be my biggest champion.

-- To Joseph Gonzales, my director at the University of the Arts, for giving me the freedom to create this thesis and offering support, ideas, and an incredible collection of resources.

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-- To Kate Crowley for editing this beast.

## Personal Statement

This thesis reflects my personal belief that museums can offer more to this world than simply a place to view amazing art or knowledge. They can create change in our society by sparking dialogue and creating community collaboration. My inspiration for this thesis began while reading *Museums of Ideas: Commitment and Conflict*. The essays that I chose as my case studies spoke to me in very different ways, as they are diverse in the way they interpret and design their content for their exhibitions. With these stories, I decided to focus my thesis on content design of exhibitions. Creating a new way to view and think of things, as well as an outlet to create dialogue among visitors that normally would not interact with one another, is an amazing tool that museums can offer.

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## List of Abbreviations

MoFD: Museum of Free Derry

IRA: Irish Republican Army

UVF: Ulster Volunteer Force

RUC: Royal Ulster Constabulary

NICRA: Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association

NEA: National Endowment for the Arts

AAM: American Alliance of Museums

MAP: AAM's Museum Assessment Program

LAC: Latin American Coalition

PBS: Public Broadcasting System

UNC: University of North Carolina

## Nomenclature

*Social change:* Encompassing a range of typical social and civic outcomes from increased awareness and understanding, to attitudinal change, to increased civic participation, the building of public will, to policy change that corrects injustice. Acknowledging that social change must start with the individual, this change also emphasizes impact that happens at a broader institutional, group, or community level.<sup>1</sup>

*Civic dialogue:* Civic Dialogue is dialogue in which people explore matters of civic importance and consider the dimensions of a civic or social issue, policy, or

decisions of consequence to their lives, communities, and society. Engaging in civic dialogue is a form of civic engagement. Sometimes civic or public dialogue is considered an important end in itself. In this context, dialogue is defined as two or more parties with differing viewpoints working toward common understanding in an open-ended and most often, face-to-face format. In dialogue: *Multiple and possibly conflicting perspectives* are included rather than promoting a single point of view. *Empathy and understanding* are promoted. *Assumptions* are brought out into the open. *Suspension of judgment* is encouraged in order to foster understanding and break down obstacles. *Equality among participants* is established to honor all voices and help build trust and safety for deep dialogue.<sup>2</sup>

*Community Collaboration:* The process of building relationships that helps to cohere community members around common purpose, identity, and a sense of belonging, which may lead to social, or community capital.<sup>3</sup> In terms of museums, building collaborations with other likeminded organizations and institutions that allow for an exchange of ideas, partnerships, and a way to effectively use materials, resources, and knowledge.

*Tolerance:* The ability or willingness to tolerate something, in particular the existence of opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with.

*Catalyst:* A person or thing that precipitates an event or change.

*Convivial:* Friendly, lively, and enjoyable.

*Nationalist Party:* The name of the main Irish nationalist party in Northern Ireland from 1921 to 1978. The Nationalist Party is of mostly Catholic background.

*Unionist Party:* The opposing party to the Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland. The Unionist Party is of mostly Protestant background.

*Loyalist Party:* The party of Ireland that is loyal to the monarchy of the United Kingdom.

*Ombudsman:* Appointed by the government or parliament but with a significant degree of independence, which is charged with representing the interests of the public by investigating and addressing complaints of maladministration or violation of rights.<sup>4</sup>

*Gerrymandering:* A practice that attempts to establish a political advantage for a particular party or group by manipulating district boundaries to create partisan advantaged districts.<sup>5</sup>

*Internment:* The imprisonment or confinement of people, without trial.

*Proxemics:* How social distance and politeness vary between cultures.

*Mestizo Country:* A country of mixed ethnicities.

*Tienda:* Store

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

**Research Question:** How can a museum effectively create an exhibition that promotes social change, civic dialogue, community collaboration, and participation through specific content design and interpretation?

**Hypothesis:** Through specific content design and interpretation, museums can act as catalysts for positive social change in their communities.

*“As people engage with objects and with each other, museums become containers and catalysts for personal growth, relationship building, social change, and healing. Museums have long been institutions that care for the world’s treasures. It is my passionate belief that the most important and essential work museums do is to use their unique resources to benefit human relationships and, ultimately, repair the world.”*

### Dr. Lois Silverman – Indiana University Bloomington

Museums can be the voice of a community as a way to promote collaborations with other organizations to effectively bring change, to remain relevant, and to create civic dialogue. The curatorial act of designing an exhibition entails many questions including:

How should a museum interpret their content?

How do they present multiple viewpoints within the same exhibition fairly?

Can a museum evoke empathy in visitors?

If museums can be outlets for such meaningful engagement with visitors and their community, then exhibition design and content needs to take risks and to not be

afraid to anger or offend anyone. Any controversial subject will prompt dialogue as it shows the importance of a particular issue. This is potentially powerful in that it can motivate behavioral and even institutional change. My research is focused on exploring how three very different museums have succeeded in stories that have created these necessary changes. These institutions vary in size, budget, and in their home or surrounding communities. As such, this thesis might be considered a toolkit of sorts, one that can be applied to other institutions that strive to create change in their communities and spark dialogue among visitors. Each museum takes a different approach to their content design. Through case studies and interviews with staff members at each institution, I am able to show successful examples of exhibitions that can create social change. Additional essays and journals offer support as to why these types of exhibitions are successful. By exploring what visitors need to experience, read, feel, and see in order to create empathy, dialogue, understanding, tolerance, and acceptance, we can see more clearly how museums can be vehicles for change.

## **Chapter 2 – Methodology**

How did I get here? Museums house amazing works of art and artifacts; they are beacons of culture, they stimulate our economy, and they are resources for the public. What if a museum could create change in a community by shifting visitors' perceptions and creating a more tolerant and accepting society? I started my research by reading *Museum of Ideas: Commitment and Conflict*. This collection of essays shares individual stories of institutions that focus around ideas rather than objects. While objects are still very prevalent in their collections, their missions are centered around a core idea, such as human rights, social inclusion, peace, war, health, gender equality, and climate change. I chose three case studies from this collection. The three museums I chose offered specific examples of effective exhibition design, specifically the manner in which the content was presented. Through the content and design of the exhibition these institutions were able to create successful and widely popular exhibitions.

### **Interviews**

I then contacted each institution to gain further knowledge and information regarding the institution itself, their mission, their process of designing specific exhibitions, and how they measured the success of the exhibitions. As of the writing of this section, I was unable to speak with the Museum of Memory and Tolerance in Mexico City. I spoke with Dr. Tom Hanchett at the Levine Museum of the New South over phone in early November and Adrian Kerr from the Museum of Free Derry, via

Skype, in September. While I compiled a list of questions for each, such as specific questions relating to staff and budgets, marketing tools, and conceptual design of the exhibitions, our interviews turned into conversations as they led me through the design process of each museum.

## **Support**

To begin my writing, I looked to books that would offer me support as to why these types of museums are successful and useful in our society. I read *The Convivial Museum* and *Visitor Voices in Museums Exhibitions* by Kathleen McLean and Wendy Pollock and a collection of essays in *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed*. My goal was to explore the expectations and needs that visitors have for museums and exhibitions. For each case study, I used supporting research from a variety of journals and collections of essays including: *Museums and Social Issues: A Journal of Reflective Discourse: Civic Discourse: Let's Talk, Museums, Equality, and Social Justice*, and *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed*.

### Chapter 3 – Literature Review

My literature review is outlined to reflect my writing process. I began with describing what a museum can become in a community while also creating social change. *The Convivial Museum* by Kathleen McLean and Wendy Pollock examines what a museum can be through the process of trust, transformation, inspiration, and community. Societies and communities need an outlet where trust and humanity begin. These authors' research demonstrates that museums can offer a place to foster trust and grow the community. In Jody Koke's and Marjorie Schwarzer's "Talking the Talk: A Call to Action," civic discourse is described as being, "vital to creating a better society. Debating, discussing, and engaging all sides of an issue helps us to arrive at a greater understanding or perhaps even an informed solution to an issue or problem. In the process, we often gain a more nuanced understanding of our communities, colleagues, friends, and even ourselves. We become active participants in the great institution of democracy."<sup>6</sup> In David Cooper's essay, "Is Civic Discourse Still Alive", democracy can only be achieved through civic discourse. Civic discourse takes on several forms. It can be achieved through consensus-building and conflict, all which are necessary to achieve the goal of understanding, tolerance, and acceptance of differences. Cooper defines civic discourse as, "the mode of collective democratic counsel. It is the way citizens think about, form, and articulate their relations with public issues. Its joints need to be flexible enough to accommodate changing climates, new voices, and new modes of communication such as digital environments and global information networks".<sup>7</sup> Margaret Kadoyama



focuses on why effective, meaningful dialogue is difficult as well as the act of listening. She offers several skills that museums can use to enhance dialogue and listening. She examines how dialogue can have a purpose and achieve a goal. I set the stage with these journals, as they add to the case studies I will present in my research. They explain what the public wants and needs and what is effective to create social change, social dialogue, and community collaboration. They are then applied to the museum world. My case studies focus around three essays found in *Museums of Ideas: Commitment and Conflict*.

*"Memory as a Muse for Morality"*

L Sasha Gora, author of "Memory as a Muse for Morality: The Museum of Memory and Tolerance in Mexico City," is my first case study. The Museum of Memory and Tolerance opened in 2010 with the mission to present the genocides of the past century to the public, while also facilitating dialogue in Mexican culture on how to promote tolerance. The museum is also a memorial dedicated to the millions of children that have lost their lives in genocides. The knowledge of the Holocaust was not well known in Mexico City public schools, and this topic is a major focus of the museum – as are other genocides. The museum uses the remembrance of history as a moral tool, which can in turn promote and teach tolerance.

*Diverse Points of View*

Dr. Tom Hanchett, chief historian at the Levine Museum of the New South, authored "An Idea-Based Exhibit: Platform for Participation." Levine Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina began in 1991 with a mission to focus and explore the history of the

South since the Civil War, with a specific emphasis on Charlotte. *Changing Places: From Black-and-White to Technicolor* was their exhibition that focused around cultural change in the Charlotte area. An surprisingly energetic response response occurred in the community as several partnerships and collaborations formed. As civic dialogue was one of the main goals of the exhibition, the entire museum intended *Changing Places* to serve “as a platform for discussion and a safe place for people to talk about tough issues.”<sup>8</sup> An overwhelmingly positive response from the community, its diverse residents, and the national museum-world has made Levine Museum an example of how to create a successful exhibition that promotes social change, civic dialogue and community engagement. Simona Bodo, in her essay, “Museums as Intercultural Spaces,” speaks of “dialogical paradigm in museums that understand heritage as a set of material and immaterial objects that should be preserved. These objects also need to be reconstructed in their meanings and made available in a common space of social interaction.”<sup>9</sup>

### *Subjective Storytelling*

Adrian Kerr, author of "Sitting on the Fence...What's the Point?" writes about The Museum of Free Derry in Northern Ireland. This museum was created by the surrounding community and for the community. A staff of three, all of whom hail from the same town, started the museum in an effort to tell their story. Their story of what happened in the Civil Rights battles of the 1960's and 1970's in Northern Ireland is not the same story told by the British government and the mainstream media. This museum was created as a purely subjective way for a community to problematize

and dispel what they see as false stories. Centered mainly on the Bloody Sunday event, the museum tells the story of a working class community that had long endured oppression and stood up to this. Kerr writes, "The Museum of Free Derry is an openly subjective museum. That is the reason we exist, and we make no apology for that. It is our greatest strength. The years of the struggle were pivotal years in Ireland, years that had massive local, national and international impact, and the events of these years, and the differing perceptions of these events, had and continue to have a major divisive effect on the different communities in the north of Ireland. Our museum was set up as a way of resolving them, not just recording them. It was set up to be an active part in the process of resolution and reconciliation, not just a passive window on the past. It was set up as part of a campaign for justice."<sup>10</sup> Bloody Sunday resulted in fourteen unarmed men being killed by the British government and the wounding of fourteen others. For almost forty years, the government labeled those that died as gunmen and bombers and constructed a judicial cover-up for their actions. The museum tells the story of what happened that day through images, text, and artifacts.

Kimberly Keith begins her essay, "Moving Beyond the Mainstream: Insight into the Relationship between Community-Based Heritage Organizations and the Museum," exploring ways to advance engagement in communities and museum visitors. This collaboration with community-based organizations allows diverse cultures and their voices to be heard throughout the museum and into society. I end my research with reaffirming what the visitors want and ask for in museums, as well as ways for

museums to promote other museums to take these steps. Kathleen McLean and Wendy Polluck, in *Visitor Voices in Museums Exhibitions*, discuss the influences that come from cultural studies and the view that museums can act as catalysts for social change. Robert Janes essay, "How Museums Change and are Changed," wrote that in order for museums to stay relevant and promote social change, civic discourse, and dialogue among visitors they must strive to always be ahead of the game and to take risks. This research and these readings influenced the direction of my thesis and my decision to focus on successful examples of exhibition design and content. Museums of all sizes can create meaningful exhibitions that evoke visitor feedback, collaboration, and dialogue.

## Chapter 4 – Creating a Museum that Promotes Social Change

Kathleen McLean and Wendy Pollock write in their book *The Convivial Museum*:

Convivial museums transform physical spaces into public places by paying attention to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional needs of their inhabitants, and enabling them to join in a sense of common purpose. The memories they inspire may include mummies and marble, but also good conversation, the exhilaration of new ideas, a sense of being part of a community, and restored faith in the possibility of a better world. When people feel welcome, comfortable, and awakened, they can begin to occupy a place and make it their own. Convivial museums open a way toward a livelier sense of common purpose-helping people to recall and make sense of the past, investigate and invent, engage in an aesthetic experience, participate in a public policy dialogue, join in a community project, or explore the big questions of human existence.<sup>11</sup>

This type of institution deepens the dialogue of visitors and fosters a genuine meeting of minds by offering up a “third thing,” or a common interest and concern.<sup>12</sup>

This common interest serves as a tool to allow visitors to begin sharing with one another and listening to one another’s experiences. Museums that serve this purpose provide spaces, materials and conditions that:

Enable people to collaborate and communicate with others, during a museum visit and beyond. This could take the form of an invitation to contribute a written comment or recording, collaborate with the organization of a dialogue

event, or even help co-create an exhibition. When a museum opens itself to authentic collaboration, a fresh new liveliness can emerge. Museums recognize the value collaborations bring to projects: fresh ideas and new points of view, additional resources and creative energy, and strengthened bonds and relationships across the community and beyond. In times like these, fostering human relationships and strengthening a sense of communal purpose may be the most important contributions museums can make.<sup>13</sup>

*“Citizens do not debate issues of public concern with friends, family, or colleagues for fear relationships will be irreparable strained in the process. I forward the ancient art of rhetoric as a possible anodyne to this situation in the hope that rhetorical invention may be able to negotiate the deliberate impasse that seems to have locked public discourse into repetition and vituperation.”*

**--Sharon Crowley**

Many people avoid civic discourse for various reasons. This can be due to the “threat” of having one’s mind changed or the fact that dialogue can spark conflict. Museums may have the same issues involving civic discourse – including fear of the risks involved. It is safer, perhaps for funding reasons, to only present facts and to hide behind the notion that museums are neutral spaces or that museums only exist to raise the awareness of the public. Despite the funding risk, there is tremendous opportunity for museums to take on the role of creating valuable, constructive

exhibitions that can create these types of conversations with visitors and the community.

*“American public opinion continues to reflect a widespread desire to reconcile new social mores with American core values, including a sense of community, neighborliness, hope, and optimism.”*

**-- Daniel Yankelovich**

A study by the Harwood Group, conducted by the Kettering Foundation, found that 80% of respondents agreed that a greater social emphasis should be placed on community building, “even if it meant compromising the pursuit of self-interest and individualism that Americans have always tried to obtain.”<sup>14</sup> The study found that conversations with community members play a significant role in the way people connect to public issues. Dialogue is found to be the most valued and important aspect of communities reaching decisions. “It is through conversation that people learn from one another, that problem solving occurs, and that a sense of hope springs forth for the future.”<sup>15</sup>

There are nine factors that the Harwood group found in their study.<sup>16</sup>

1. Citizens have a desire to make connections between public concerns, rather than isolating one issue from another.
2. People value personal context. It is the lens through which they view public concerns. Instead of defining personal context as pure self-interest,

however, citizens typically draw on their life experiences, personal stories, and imagination to establish ties to public concerns, rather than sources of retreat from those concerns.

3. People express a keen desire for coherence in understanding public problems. Rather than relying on mass media for balanced information, citizens typically view the explosion of fragmented information that crowds our television screens as contributing to incoherence and misunderstanding.
4. People insist that they need room for ambivalence in the public arena. The drive to take a position on an issue and stick to it undermines the listening and testing of ideas that citizens value.
5. People express a range of emotions about public life. Emotion emerges as a natural and vital part of people forming relationships with public concerns.
6. People highly prize authenticity as being a crucial filter through which they view public life. In particular, citizens report that they are generally distrustful of the language of experts because that language too often fails to capture the meaning of people's lives and concerns.
7. People yearn for a greater sense of possibility in public life. They are in search of an abiding belief, a feeling that it is possible to make progress on intractable public problems and that they themselves can play a meaningful role in bringing about that progress.



8. Citizens frequently talk about individuals in their daily lives that serve as catalysts: the person down the street, the family member, or the friend who spurs one to discuss and act on public concerns.
9. Citizens refer to the effectiveness of mediating institutions that serve as places for people to come together and talk about, learn, and act on public concerns.

## **Conclusion**

While the majority of the public shies away from civic discourse and conversations that may create conflict, debates, and differing points of view, the majority also recognizes the importance of civic discourse and conversations. A museum is recognized to be a “safe” space to create these types of dialogue, as trained and skilled staff is able to moderate as they are curating the questions and conversations that begin a dialogue among visitors. If visitors are then able to continue dialogue from the questions and ideas presented by the museum, then the goal of creating civic discourse has been achieved by the institution. Allowing a visitor to dialogue with someone with whom he/she might not have been able to or even thought of speaking with is an asset that museums can use to their advantage as museums can create these “safe” spaces for all cultures races, and ages.

## Chapter 5 - Subjective Storytelling: Museum of Free Derry in Northern Ireland



Annual Budget: £100,000

Staff: Three Full-Time Staff Members

### About the Museum

The Museum of Free Derry (MoFD) opened its doors in 2007. The goal of the museum is to tell the story of the community of those that lived through the events of the civil rights struggle of the late 1960's and early 1970's in Northern Ireland. The story is told through the point of view of the community members of Free Derry that were most affected by the events surrounding this time. For forty years, the British government and the media masked the truth of the events that happened, most notably Bloody Sunday. This distorted version of the story is now being corrected from the community's perspective. The Museum of Free Derry:

Believes it is vital that all those involved in the events of the last forty years, take the opportunity to tell their own stories in a subjective but honest way, as a first step towards a greater understanding of all the elements that led to the

most recent phase of the conflict in Ireland. This is not something that can be achieved through attempting to give a single 'official' version of events.<sup>17</sup>

The museum has an archive of over 25,000 items relating to the city's history. Almost all of these artifacts have been donated to the museum by local residents and include items of the utmost historical importance. The Museum of Free Derry strives to be an "expression of local identity and experience, a means of education and information on an era that had, and continues to have, major local, national and international significance, a means to preserve artifacts and documentation from this era for this and future generations, to make them available for study and research, and finally to act as a contribution to the local economy, which is still suffering from the effects of this turbulent period."<sup>18</sup>



### **Museum of Free Derry**

#### **Mission**

MoFD currently acts under the mission statement of the Bloody Sunday Trust, MoFD's parent organization.

“...The advancement of the education of the general public to raise greater awareness and understanding of their heritage and to compile and hold in trust archival materials and artifacts publicly accessible and displayed in the Museum of Free Derry in the advancement of human and civil rights, tolerance, and diversity throughout the island of Ireland and internationally.”

### **Background of Civil Rights Movement in Ireland**

(Adapted from <http://www.museumoffreederry.org/history-bloody-background.html>)

The Government of Ireland Act (1920) created Northern Ireland by dividing the six northeastern counties of Ireland from the other twenty-six counties. These six counties, Fermanagh, Antrim, Tyrone, Derry, Armagh and Down, had a majority of Unionists. The other twenty-six counties, and Ireland as a whole, had a Nationalist/Republican majority and had supported Sinn Féin in its attempts to establish an independent Ireland. The northern Unionists refused to live in an Ireland that would be controlled by the Nationalist/Republican Parties. As a result the British government created Northern Ireland. One third of the population of Northern Ireland was Nationalists/Republicans who did not want to be divided from the rest of Ireland. Throughout its history, Northern Ireland was unstable. Unionists, fearing attack from the Irish Republic and their Nationalist neighbors, would not share power with Nationalists and electoral boundaries in areas in which Nationalists were in the majority to ensure that Nationalists were denied power. Nationalists resented being governed by the Unionists and saw little hope in elections because they were unable

to win power. The Nationalist party could not defeat the Unionist party because when Northern Ireland was created it was designed to always have a Unionist majority. Militant Republicans - the IRA - attacked the state of Northern Ireland through the years of 1920-1970. Between 1956 and 1962 the IRA had attacked Northern Ireland, but in 1962 they stopped because they had no support from Nationalists residing there. It seemed in the 1960's that the possibility of a settlement might exist. Sean Lemass, the Taoiseach, met Terence O'Neill, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, to discuss improving relations. This enraged some Loyalist extremists and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) became active again in 1966. But within the Nationalist community, while concern about the border was decreasing, there was increasing anger about discrimination in jobs, housing, and voting rights. This led to the formation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) on February 1, 1967. The NICRA led protests and rallies, demanding that their civil rights be heard, their goals were:

1. One man one vote in local elections.
2. The removal of gerrymandered boundaries.
3. Anti-discrimination laws.
4. Fair allocation of public housing.
5. Repeal of the special powers act.
6. Disbanding the Royal Ulster Constabulary. (RUC)

On October 5, 1968, in Derry City, the world's media witnessed civil rights demonstrators being attacked by the police. This turned the Civil Rights Movement

into a mass movement. In November 1968, in response to the Civil Rights campaign, Terrence O'Neill announced the following Reform Package.

1. Local councils to allocate housing on a points system.
2. An Ombudaman to be appointed to appoint grievances.
3. Derry Corporation to be replaced.
4. Local government to be reformed.
5. Special powers act to be reformed.

These reforms angered Unionists who opposed any change and failed to satisfy Nationalists, who wanted more changes. Riots and rallies began throughout Northern Ireland. One particular rally took place in Derry. As the demonstrators passed the edge of the Bogside neighborhood, stones were thrown. Police responded by driving the Nationalists into the neighborhood but when they tried to follow them into the area they were stopped. The residents attempting to stop the police from entering used petrol bombs, stones, and bottles. After two days British Soldiers replaced the police, exhausted and demoralized. The rioting ended in Derry when it became clear that the soldiers wouldn't try to enter the Bogside. In January of 1969 a civil rights march from Belfast to Derry took place. On the last day, loyalists attacked the march twice before reaching Derry. That night rioting took place. Relations between Derry's Nationalists, the police, and government got steadily worse. On August 12, 1969, during the annual Unionist Apprentice Boys parade in Derry, violence once again started. The violence in Derry ended but in Belfast it continued into the next day, with six people being killed, 150 homes burned

and 3,500 families fleeing their homes. Across Northern Ireland, 342 men were arrested and imprisoned without trial. The reaction of the Nationalist community was fury. Protest marches organized by NICRA began throughout Northern Ireland. One of the protests took place in Derry on January 30, 1972, the day that is now known as Bloody Sunday.<sup>19</sup>

### **Events of Bloody Sunday**

A non-violent march to oppose the British government's use of internment was organized on January 30, 1972. Fifteen thousand members from the community marched through the streets of Free Derry while the British Army's Parachute Regiment waited for them. As the marchers made their way to a rally, the paratroopers followed them, firing into the crowd. Fifteen minutes later, thirteen unarmed men and boys were dead, while fifteen others were injured. One of the wounded died from his wounds a few months later. This all occurred directly outside the building that is now the Museum of Free Derry.

### **Exhibit**

Upon entering the museum, visitors read these words:

The Museum of Free Derry was established by the Bloody Sunday Trust to tell the story of the civil rights movement and the creation of Free Derry in the 1960s and 1970s. It tells the story of the people of a working class community who endured oppression and rose up against it. The story is told here from the people's point of view. This museum is not just a place of record but of

education, so that all might learn from the Free Derry struggle as we learned from others...The civil rights movement in Ireland has its deepest roots in Derry. It was here on October 5, 1968 that the issue of civil rights in the north first came to the attention of the world when the RUC attacked a peaceful demonstration in Duke Street. It was here that the first no go area was declared in January 1969, when the defiant slogan 'You are Now Entering Free Derry' appeared on a gable wall in the Bogside. It was here on January 30, 1972, on Bloody Sunday that fourteen unarmed demonstrators were shot dead and fourteen others injured by the British army in the streets around this building. In taking on the might of the state, the powerless challenged the way that things had always been and dared to dream a different world where justice, equality, and freedom were the entitlement of all. In this museum and archive rests part of their legacy. Their epitaph is the continuing struggle for democracy. This museum is dedicated to all who have struggled and suffered for civil rights everywhere..."<sup>20</sup>

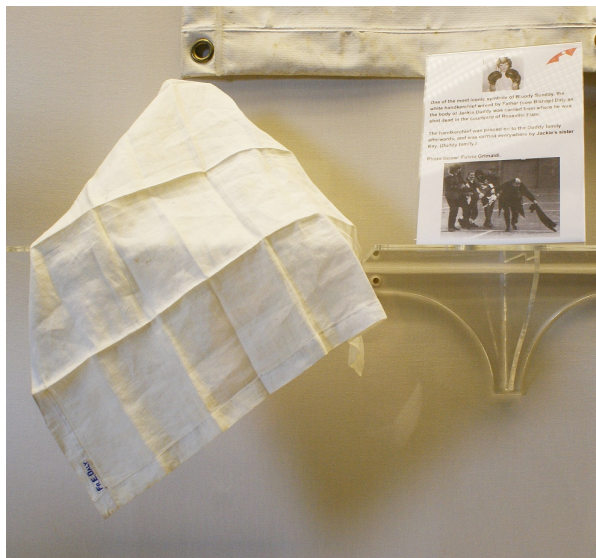
The years of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland had and have enormous impact on a local, national, and international level. MoFD was created in an effort to resolve these different perceptions of what happened, not just recording the facts. "It was set up to be an active part in the process of resolution and reconciliation, not just a passive window on the past. It was set up as part of a campaign for justice."<sup>21</sup> The events that happened on Bloody Sunday left fourteen dead and another fourteen injured. The British government labeled the unarmed victims as gunmen



and bombers. It took them thirty-nine years to admit that Bloody Sunday was “unjustified and unjustifiable” and that all the victims were innocent.

## Content

Walking through the exhibition, visitors encounter several artifacts from Bloody Sunday: flags that hung from rooftops, police weapons used against the marchers, the bloodstained banner of the Derry Civil Rights Association that was used to cover the bodies of two that were killed that day, jackets and a shirt with bullet holes, and the white handkerchief waved by Father Daly. This handkerchief is one of the most memorable artifacts the museum owns, as it is shown in several photographs, depicting Father Daly waving the white flag as a sign of peace as he carried the body of Jackie Duddy, a 17-year-old, that was shot and killed.



**Father Daly's Handkerchief**

“All these elements together – the story, the artifacts, the staff and the site – make a visit to the museum a very emotional and moving experience. Visitors don’t just get information on what happened here; they get a true feel for what happened, why it happened, and how it affected the community. They get an understanding of how these events shaped the years of violent conflict that followed. They get a feeling for the full impact of these events.”<sup>22</sup> The Ulster Museum in Belfast, Northern Ireland’s “official” museum, opened an exhibition focusing on Bloody Sunday a few years after the doors of MoFD opened. Borrowing artifacts and photographs from MoFD, their exhibition left out critical details of that day. Adrian Kerr spoke at a conference in Belfast to express his concerns with the exhibition. He voiced that, “this new exhibition would become exactly the type of one-size-fits all display that would tell a compromised, sanitized version of recent history that satisfied no one and offered nothing towards resolving the issues raised by our divided history. As a government-funded museum they are answerable to basically everyone, and so had to try to find a way to please everyone, or at least not offend anyone. But in their need to avoid anything remotely sensitive, potentially divisive or possibly challenging, they have ended up with a bland display of basic facts and figures, together with a few photographs and slide shows.”<sup>23</sup> He argued that the exhibition was sterilized to the point that it does not do an effective job of telling the story. One of the most poignant examples of this “sterilization” comes from a photograph that was on loan from MoFD. This photograph shows a rubble barricade, moments after the British Army opened fire on the unarmed crowd. In the photograph is a young man walking,

glancing at a group of men surrounding another young man that has just been shot. Seconds after this photograph was taken, Michael McDaid was shot dead.



**Michael McDaid, far left**

These facts are present at the MoFD, however at the Ulster Museum, the caption reads, “Bloody Sunday, Derry 30 January 1972.”<sup>24</sup> Adrian Kerr again voiced his opposition of the use of this photograph in the Ulster Museum. “If a photo is not going to be used properly then there is no point in using it, in much the same way that if a story is not going to be told properly there is no point in telling it.”<sup>25</sup> Same photograph, a world of difference with a lack of content provided. The Ulster Museum uses it to show the conflict, but MoFD uses the photograph to tell a story, a story that not only shows an innocent man moments before his death, but tells a complex story of a government unwilling and unable to come to terms with wrongful doing. Kerr writes that he knows “museums have to cater for a wide range of visitors, including young ones, and I would never argue for the gratuitous use of violent

images, but it is a violent story that has to be told and if you are not willing to tackle that head on then I don't think you should tackle it all."<sup>26</sup>

Glass cases line the walls of the museum; encased are artifacts, behind them are photographs from Bloody Sunday, the artifact on display is shown in the photo. Next to the photograph of Michael McDaid is his suit jacket, the bullet hole visible in the back. A photograph of Michael Kelly lying in the street shows a bloodstained cloth that was used to stop the flow of blood. The photograph, the story, and the artifact combine to create a powerful message to the visitor.



**Bloodstained cloth, Michael Kelly**

Is a museum that offers photographs and artifacts in their exhibition but does not relay the proper information or leaves portions out perform a useful function? Showing a photograph of a conflict is one thing, but to tell the story behind the photograph opens the viewer to a new way of thinking critically about an issue. L Sasha Gora, writes “all museums and exhibitions are created through a process of selection. History – even the worst parts of it – does not exist in a prepackaged form.

On the contrary, curators, historians, and museum educators select what to include and exclude. Nations and national identities are built around conversations – conversations about what to remember and what to forget.”<sup>27</sup> What role does the Ulster Museum provide in preserving the nation’s story or does it attempt to recognize, while also forgetting a part of the nation’s past, a part of the past that would like to be forgotten? In order for museums to stay relevant and promote social change, civic discourse, and dialogue among visitors, they must strive to always be ahead of the game and to take risks.

### **Interview with Adrian Kerr**

September 23, 2013

Adrian Kerr is the author of “Sitting on the Fence...What’s the Point?” from the collection of essays, *Museums of Ideas: Commitment and Conflict*. He is one of the founding members of the Museum of Free Derry, and one of three full-time staff members. In 2007, after ten years of conceptual planning, the Museum of Free Derry opened its doors. It began with a vision by the three staff members, two of whom lost members in the events of Bloody Sunday. The museum houses their core exhibition, while plans to have traveling exhibitions are currently being designed. MoFD hopes to have these ready by March of 2014. There has been such a universally positive experience at the museum that staff hopes to open traveling exhibitions both in Ireland and internationally. Funds are currently being raised to open a research center and classrooms for continued education. As all museums in Ireland are

government funded, I asked Adrian if he felt any negative attention by the British government in terms of funding and he said no. Forty percent of their funding comes from government grants, mainly from the local level. Sixty percent of their funding comes from admission and fundraising for the museum. As a small museum with a small staff they currently have no way to gauge why this tiny museum has such an international appeal. Some people have said they came to Derry specifically to visit MoFD, but it is not a question they regularly ask, so he could not give a more definite answer. MoFD tends to judge marketing materials on an ongoing basis – there are obvious outlets they would use every year, such as social media, local visitor guides, maps, and specific citywide events. While plans are in the works to expand the museum and to create education space, Kerr is “confident in the story that the museum is telling.” It allows visitors to experience a one-sided story, and he thinks that’s the most effective way to create dialogue among visitors. He is always overwhelmed by the visitors responses as they leave the museum, as it confirms the idea of subjective-storytelling. He shared with me several examples of this feedback.

### **Visitor Feedback**

MoFD has a guest book at the front desk where visitors are invited to leave their comments. Below are just a few examples:

“Thank you very much for your struggle. World is watching.” – Sweden

“Very powerful and emotional.” – Belfast

“Overwhelming.” – USA

“God bless those fourteen dead.” – ex-British soldier

“Another step on our journey for truth.” – Derry

“A shocking and sad experience.” – Germany

“Very confronting and emotional.” – Holland

“A not too unfamiliar story.” – South Africa

“Extremely thought provoking.” – England

“Humbling.” – Liverpool

“An invaluable contribution to the education of the next generation.” – Bristol

“Stirring and upsetting.” – Germany

“This is the people’s place.” – Derry

## **Conclusion**

As the Museum of Free Derry continues to expand, more outlets for visitor evaluations and marketing opportunities will be available, and the impact of the museum will reach a wider audience. As of right now, the subject matter and the subjective manner in which it is told is compelling enough for international visitors. They journey to this small town in Northern Ireland in order to visit this museum and

hear the community's story. The photographs are explicit, the objects are evocative, and the stories are saddening, but they tell of the struggle that the community needs the world to hear. They recognize that their voices have been silenced for the past forty years and, while no real comfort can be given to the community for what they have endured, the museum offers an outlet and opens their doors to all who would like to listen. The MoFD acts as a living memorial for those that died in Bloody Sunday and a space for the community to share their anger and sadness. While some may prefer the content of the Ulster Museum, MoFD offers a different side to the story. Luckily, Northern Ireland is able to tell their story as the museum offers a space for them to do so. Many communities throughout the world have the same sad story to tell, but are unable to share their side due to oppression, an unwilling government, or a lack of funding. Museums hold a certain amount of respect throughout the world and MoFD can tell their story in the confines of a museum space, which is an incredibly powerful tool, and clearly successful in the responses they have received from visitors.



## Chapter 7 - “Memory as a Muse for Morality”: The Museum of Memory and Tolerance in Mexico City



*“It is as if once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember.”*

**- - James E. Young**

**Staff:** Ten Full-Time Staff Members

**\*\***At this time, I have been unable to follow through with an interview with the Museums of Memory and Tolerance. I was able to establish initial contact, however after repeated attempts to send questions to the museum staff, I never received a response. I include this case study as I believe their subject matter and the way they interpret and present their content is relevant, in that they combine the use of art to evoke empathy while presenting facts of atrocities of the past century to visitors. Their workshops and spatial areas in which visitors can critically think about their

roles in our society constitute an arena for acceptance and a mechanism to promote tolerance in our world.

### **About the Museum**

In 1999, the museum began as a non-profit with the purpose of fostering tolerance through historical memory. By showing examples of intolerance throughout history - specifically genocides - the values of tolerance and diversity can be understood and evoked. The physical museum space opened its doors in 2010. The objectives of the museum are to promote the values of tolerance and respect, to encourage new generations to live more healthfully and increase their commitment to a viable environment, to confront the visitor with a look at intolerance throughout the world by creating an introspection and a change in attitude, to foster reflection resulting in social action, and to educate and to create awareness and commitment to the needs of the most vulnerable.<sup>28</sup> The museum's goal is to inspire dialogue within Mexican society. The museum is divided into an historical and practical museum as well as a way to memorialize those who have died in genocides. The museum uses the remembrance of history as a moral tool to transmit and promote dialogue. As "memorials and museums are architectural reflections of these conversations, they exhibit what is included in the narrative of a nation, what is excluded, and how the past is narrated, assigning a political and social use to memorials and museums."<sup>29</sup> As an idea-based museum, the museum is devoted to tolerance. Though objects are

used to tell the story, it is the overarching ideas – and not the objects – that are the focus.

### **Mission**

The mission of The Museum of Memory and Tolerance is, “To teach and diffuse among Mexican society, the importance of tolerance and diversity. To create awareness through the memory of history and the significance of the Holocaust and other genocides; alerting the visitor as to the dangers of hate, discrimination and indifference, in order to thus create awareness, respect and responsibility in each individual.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Exhibit**

The act of curating a memory comes with the task of selecting of what is important and what needs to be displayed. As curators develop an exhibition, borders are created as some meanings are cut. In the same way, memories cannot exist without a border; certain memories must be cut, while others are created. L Sasha Gora writes in her essay in *Museums of Ideas*:

What is the relationship between museums, memorials, the present, the past and the political? Can memories be permanently fixed in museums if the present gives a meaning to the past and the past is always changed by the present? What to remember and what to forget becomes a political issue. Memory plays an essential role in nation-building because memories create a

common history or common ethos - and so a state may promote certain memories and discourage others.<sup>31</sup>

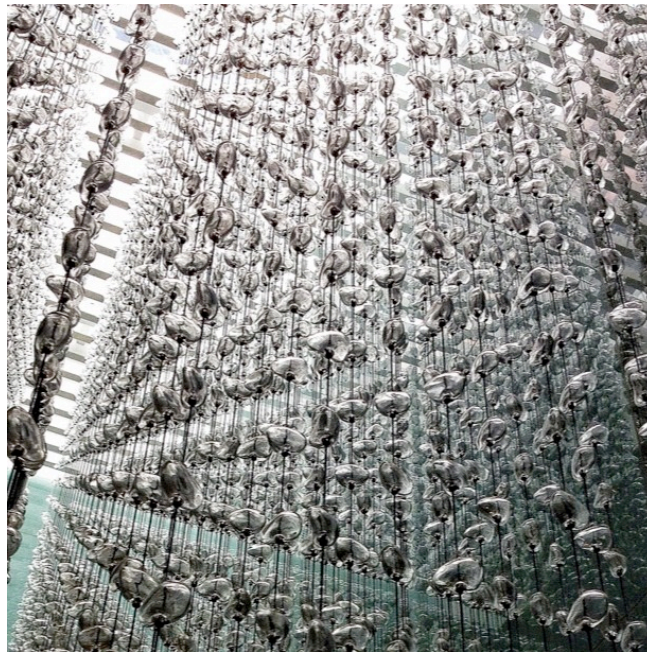
As the museum uses learning and education as tools to create tolerance and dialogue throughout Mexico, the museum reached out to schools in order to gauge what subject matter should be addressed. A 2000 poll conducted by the National Autonomous University of Mexico discovered that there was little awareness of the Holocaust in Mexican public schools.<sup>32</sup> While the museum does focus around the Holocaust, many other acts of genocides throughout history are also highlighted, such as Cambodia and Darfur. This allows for a connection between issues of hate and discrimination that are occurring in modern day Mexico and creates connections to those of the past. Mexico identifies itself as a “mestizo” country – a country of mixed ethnicities – however intolerance is very prevalent with regard to certain minorities and the impoverished. The museum strives to foster views of the Holocaust and other genocides as it presents history and memory of these acts. It presents a new framework of discourse as to how we view historical events and crimes. The museums present these questions to the design of their exhibition:

“Do Holocaust memorials and discourse change the likelihood of less genocides happening?”

“Do accounts of past suffering aid in decreasing future suffering?”

“If genocides continue, how can we mobilize Holocaust discourse in a more effective way?”<sup>33</sup>

The museum's idea is that in remembering these events, we will not repeat them. The museum is seven floors of exhibition space. They are divided between three levels of permanent exhibition space and four temporary exhibitions. The permanent space is dedicated to memory and tolerance. A large memorial that hangs from the ceiling separates these two themes. This memorial is dedicated to the children that have been killed in genocides throughout the century. The Children's Memorial, which is curated by Dutch artist Jan Hendrix, is a hanging space of 20,000 glass tears. Each tear represents 100 children that have died in genocides. This memorial greets visitors as they make their way through the floors. "The symbolism of the room triggers an emotional reaction in visitors as they move from one theme – memory – to the next – tolerance."<sup>34</sup>



**Children's Memorial**

The next floor is dedicated to tolerance and starts with a mural painted by Mexican artist Gusatvo Aceves and ends with a space of reflection created by another Mexican artist, Helen Escobedo. The ceiling in this room moves up and down, as it symbolizes oppression and liberation. These two pieces of art give the visitor the ability to experience the emotional content. Visitors are able to feel the walls pulse in and out as an act of closing in on them and opening. The museum uses the art of design in these spaces to relate the content that will follow on the remaining floors. The museum uses the ideas of James E. Young to create these spaces. Young focuses on “the creation of public memory” as it shows that memorials are constructed to not only build memories, but they themselves act as memory-makers.<sup>35</sup> Most visitors of the museum have not experienced the Holocaust or other genocides. However, by visiting the museum, visitors are able to construct memories and understanding of these points in history. As memorials create a memory, they also create shared experiences with other visitors, while also creating individual memories.

## **Content**

The content focuses around the beginning of the Nazi rule that started in 1933. Not only does the museum tell the story of the Nazi reign and fall, it also explains how the Nazi regime was prosecuted. The process of focusing not only on the story of the Holocaust, but also the fall of the Nazis, tells a story of cause and effect. There are legal and moral consequences to these actions. Moving on, visitors experience other

genocides in our history: the mass murders of Armenians in WWI and genocides in the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Rwanda, Guatemala and Darfur. The idea behind the content and the design is to introduce visitors to horrific events of our history, and then relate them to individuals and how they react and deal with issues in their personal lives. Visitors are asked to reflect on how they discriminate and how they can become more aware of their own behaviors and actions. As the Museum of Memory and Tolerance is dedicated to an idea, the use of objects is still prevalent, as these help tell a story and relate to a specific place and time. The museum holds several actual objects from these genocides to help anchor their mission of memory and tolerance. They include original genocide material from Rwanda, a Poland railroad train car that the Nazis used to transport prisoners, and photographs of death marches from the Holocaust, just to name a few. The museum believes that the visceral act of seeing these objects that hold meaning, but also support content, offers the visitors personal stories of these crimes. The stories that relate to these objects create meaning in the exhibition. A uniform that is shown to have been worn by a Concentration Camp victim is “not significant by its fabric or design, but by the context that is associated with it.”<sup>36</sup> Photographs are also used as life-size, black-and-white images of Holocaust prisoners in their uniforms, create “a haunting sense of their presence, as visitor can look into their eyes.”<sup>37</sup> The Cambodian genocide illustrates a wall of small, black-and-white images of prisoners and victims. “A Wanted for Genocide” poster hangs to represent the genocide of Rwanda with the images of criminals, some of them not yet brought to trial, which brings this crime

into present day. As the images, content, and objects that are used in the exhibition tell a story of genocide, hate, and crime throughout the world, they also tell the story of moral currency in modern times, specifically Mexican society. “The museum filters memories of the Holocaust and other genocides in a way that makes visitors think about their own identity, behavior, and even their own acts of intolerance.”<sup>38</sup>

Once visitors make their way through the historical breakdown of these crimes, they are greeted by the Children’s Memorial. Visitors then make their way to the Tolerance section of the museum. There are twenty themes that are connected to the idea of tolerance. Some include:

*Myself and Others:* In which visitors reflect on their own identities and how outside forces influence their identity.

*Stereotypes and Prejudices:* Which asks visitors to confront their own prejudices.

*The Power of Media:* Which encourages visitors to approach media critically.

*Human Rights:* Illustrating the rights that all humans have.

*Intolerable Realities:* Which focuses on violations of human rights such as child labor and child pornography.

*Our Mexico:* Which encourages visitors to value the diversity of Mexico, while also pointing out the discrimination that also defines the country.

*Forum of Responsibility:* Which makes visitors acknowledge moments in their lives in which they discriminated against others.



*Commitment and Indifference:* Which seeks to transcend the traditional limitations of a museum in order to become a space promoting the sense of responsibility and commitment of human beings.<sup>39</sup>



**Holocaust Prisoners Marching**

Karen Kroslowitz writes:

Memorials create a place for communities and societies to gather to console and remember. They create a space for multicultural and intergenerational interactions with those that visit. In direct peer-to-peer conversations, by indirect messaging through letters, poetry, songs and prayers, and via representational objects and artworks, citizens express and collectively exhibit the moral and civic values held by their communities. Though in-depth evaluation is needed, museums might consider using the framework of spontaneous memorialization to foster dialogue and discourse within their communities.<sup>40</sup>

Sociologists Charles Haney, Christina Leimer, and Juliann Lowery assert that “spontaneous memorials encourage disparate community members to communicate and collaborate, bond in shared emotions, establish new cultural identity, and to

participate in history. Civic discourse, as the constructive, creative, and collaborative exchange of ideas in an inclusive environment, takes many forms at spontaneous memorials and may be direct or symbolic.”<sup>41</sup> Kroslowitz offers several examples of memorials throughout American history and the impact they had for those visitors. She focuses on New York after the 9/11 attacks, with a group of New York University students who asked anyone they saw to write down their feelings of the events. Memorials also offer solace to those that may have lost someone; they are able to communicate with the victims through writings and tangible artifacts and tokens.

## **Conclusion**

“Memorials foster intergenerational sharing of personal knowledge and affirm moral values. Through dedicated space, spontaneous memorials function as “bulletin boards of discourse.” <sup>42</sup> The MoMT use of a memorial in their space allows visitors to connect the content they just viewed in the historical section. The use of art to represent millions of children that have died as a result of genocides gives the visitor the opportunity to reflect on what they just witnessed through content and artifacts. After visitors are able to connect what they witnessed and the feelings they have experienced they are then able to apply it to their own lives as they visit the tolerance section of the museum. MoMT is a unique example of history, artifacts, art, memorials and workshops all housed in one space. They have taken social issues, a lack of understanding about the Holocaust and discrimination in their communities, and applied it into the museum. The content and artifacts create awareness of

topics, the memorial evokes empathy, and the workshops help visitors critically think about their own lives and create a space for dialogue.

## Chapter 6 - Diverse Points of View: Levine Museum of the New South

### In Charlotte, North Carolina



Annual Budget: \$2 million

Staff: Seventeen Full-Time Staff Members

#### **About the Museum**

The New South represents the period of the South from 1865 (the end of the Civil War) to the present. The museum was created as a way of encouraging new thinking and new perspectives on the economic, political, and cultural life in the South. Levine strives to reinvent itself and to encompass the spirit of evolution as newcomers, natives, immigrants, visitors, and residents change the composition and direction of the region.<sup>43</sup>

In 1990, Sally Dalton Robinson and Anne Batten from the Mecklenburg Historical Association formulated the idea for the museum. On April 25, 1991, the museum was established as the Museum of the New South. The following year, the museum began as interactive kiosks and exhibits throughout Charlotte. They opened a public space in 1996 in a building in downtown Charlotte, which housed temporary exhibits

and education programs. Following an \$8.2 million capital campaign, renovations began for the installation of a permanent exhibit.

Beginning in the fall of 2001, the Levine Museum of the New South opened a 40,000-square-foot building that features a permanent exhibition as well as changing exhibitions.

### **Mission**

“Our mission is to engage a broad-based audience in the exploration and appreciation of the diverse history of the South since the Civil War, with a focus on Charlotte and the surrounding Carolina Piedmont. Through the Museum we collect, preserve, and interpret the materials, sights, sounds, and ideas that illumine and enliven this history. The Museum presents opportunities for life-long learning about this history for the benefit, enjoyment and education of children and adults, and provides historical context for contemporary issues and a community forum for thoughtful discussion.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Background**

*Changing Places: From Black-and-White to Technicolor* opened at the museum on February 14, 2009. Due to the overwhelming public response, the exhibit remained on view until November 2010 and The American Alliance of Museums named *Changing Places* co-winner of the annual Excellence in Exhibitions Award with Special Recognition for Community Engagement in 2010. Museum president Emily

Zimmern and staff historian Dr. Tom Hanchett began their museum outreach by speaking with community leaders to deal with the demographic shift that was taking place in Charlotte. As most of the South remained an isolated region of the country, Charlotte was seeing a change in the cultural diversity as new residents from around the country and the world began to move the city. Mecklenburg County had 500,000 residents in 1990; by 2010, there were over a million residents.<sup>45</sup> Transplants from New York, Ohio, Mexico, El Salvador, Vietnam, Bosnia, Somalia, as well as a large population of African-Americans were returning to the area. “As these communities brought their own traditions, habits, and assumptions, it creates a new culture in the city, but also creates tensions among neighbors.”<sup>46</sup>

*“Tell Me A Story with Me in It.”*

### **Levine Museum of the New South Founder – Sally Dalton Robinson**

#### **Exhibit**

Tom Hanchett begins his essay in *Museums of Ideas: An Idea-Based Exhibit: Platform for Participation* with these questions:

“What if a museum chose an idea, a difficult issue that its community needed to grapple with? Could a history museum’s expertise – exploring the background of a problem, helping participants see several viewpoints, engaging people not just in the printed word but in interactions and conversations – be useful as city residents confront real-world challenges today?”<sup>47</sup> His vision of the exhibition was it would act

as a “platform for participation,” where community groups could use the exhibit to fit with their own needs. With success from a prior exhibit, Levine Museum uses the tagline, “Using history to build community.”<sup>48</sup> The museum actively searches for subject matter that the current community is dealing with and applies history to create dialogue among visitors and the community. Through their museum outreach, most of the exhibits that are created are done with partnerships with community organizations. The museum also offers civic dialogue with every new exhibition that is created with help from the AAM Museum Assessment Program (MAP).<sup>49</sup> Cultural change can bring lots of new opportunities to a city; however, the blending of new and old cultures can be challenging - specifically when dialogue is not started between groups and communities. The basis of *Changing Places* brought these challenges to the forefront, while also acknowledging that they existed and were felt across the community. The exhibit opens the stage to visitors to participate in dialogue, an opportunity for them to relate to community challenges and to think of new ways to handle the stresses that come with cultural change in a community. Charlotte’s community foundation funded the museum with an \$80,000 grant that gave staff the opportunity to meet with community groups and conduct research into creating a meaningful exhibit. The museum held monthly lunches with scholars, journalists, and social service agencies to discuss ways to tell a story in an exhibit that would “break down us-and-them barriers and help visitors of all backgrounds view this as their story.”<sup>50</sup> The museum, during the process of exhibition design, met with community and cultural groups, gave presentations, and gathered feedback.

One example of this community collaboration included filming at the local PBS station with groups of educators, ethnic leaders, the police department's International Relations unit, and the Latin American Coalition (LAC). A staff member of the LAC talked about a recent Thanksgiving dinner she shared with a Mexican family who wanted to make a turkey and boxed stuffing, but also included holiday tamales. A small but powerful story as it highlighted a cultural group embracing their new culture, but not losing their own. This talk at PBS led to LAC being involved in the *Changing Places* exhibition design, and created a partnership with the museum. These small group talks and lunches also created a powerful tool for potential funding for the museum. The Center for Applied Research at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte formed a partnership with the museum. They conducted a front-end evaluation that focused on a range of demographic groups and community leaders. This research helped drive content in the exhibition as it provided quotes and insights for text panels. The Knight Foundation, the local PBS station, Goodrich, and several other Fortune 500 companies all became sponsors in a variety of ways and helped fund *Changing Places* in its entirety for \$875,000.

Three goals were created for the exhibit.

1. Visitors would better grasp the scale and scope of demographic change in the Charlotte region.
2. Visitors would reflect on how this change affects their own lives and recognize some processes that all of us are involved in as we grapple with such change.
3. Visitors would be inspired to take action to build bridges across difference –



simply talking to strangers, seeking out new cultural experiences, asking how their organizations might become more inclusive.<sup>51</sup>

## **Content**

*Changing Places* was divided into six main environments:

### *1. "What do I keep, what do I change?"*

Theme: Maintaining and modifying cultural traditions.

Video: An Indian woman and her daughter who was raised in Charlotte, discuss the mixture of Indian and American traditions in America.

Environment: The environment recreated a Hindu household in Charlotte that shows the difference of American and Hindu cultures, as well as the combination of the two. The Charlotte Hindu Center donated a Hindu home shrine. The kitchen is set up to show a blending of two cuisines, including Indian lasagna that was created by an Indian mother at her children's request.

Artifacts: Examples of Indian dress, accompanied by photographs of those that lent the clothing the museum. Examples of these different types of dress are available for visitors to try on next to a mirror.

Done Before: This section pointed to the fact that traditions of diverse cultures were already experienced in the South before, such as the blending of European, African, and Native American heritages.

Likewise: This section was designed to ask the question, "What do I keep, what do I change?" Different groups were asked this question and their answers were

recorded, the groups were diverse as they included a Carolina farm festival, refugees from Hurricane Katrina, and a German language school.

Post-it Boards Asks: Post-it boards were found throughout the entire exhibit. This section included the question, “What parts of your culture have you kept? What have you let go of?”<sup>52</sup>



**Hindu Household Environment**

## *2. Uh, What Did You Say?*

Theme: Struggling with Barriers to Communication – Both Language and Cultural Assumptions.

Video: An African woman who speaks French now lives in Charlotte and reacts to feeling isolated as her children are learning English.

Interactives: An anthropologist from a local university explains “proxemics,” a term to describe how different cultures interpret the correct use of social distance and politeness throughout the world. His discussion with the museum also led to the centerpiece, or signature object, of the exhibit: a wire-frame mannequin that greets

visitors as they first enter the exhibit. Footprints in front of the mannequin mark what the polite distance is for someone to stand when interacting with another person. Each set of footprints has a country name beside it explaining the social norms of that country and culture. Another interactive is a sliding scale on which each visitor could investigate differences between Southerners and Northerners. One example given is how Southerners feel comfortable talking about religion, while Northerners are inherently more private when it comes to religion. This interactive creates a main stage for dialogue among visitors.<sup>53</sup>



### **Proxemics Mannequin**

#### *3. Selling a Taste of Home*

Theme: Using Traditional Culture as a Business Springboard

Video: A Texas-born woman from a Mexican family speaks about her store that has also been a place for Mexican and Hispanic community members to gather.

Artifacts: A store or tienda much like the woman owns in the video, is recreated. Hundreds of these stores are now prevalent throughout Charlotte and the South as Hispanic communities move in all across the region for jobs. A jukebox is also in this area, which allows visitors to experience Latino music, and hear the similarities between mainstream “American” songs and how they have influence Latino music and vice versa. This part of the exhibition was also designed in part with LAC.<sup>54</sup>

#### *4. Getting Past Us and Them*

Theme: Grappling with Barriers of Stereotypes

Environment: This portion of the exhibit takes a new turn as visitors have to enter through strips of clear vinyl that have hurtful words written across them that block the entrance.

Video: Another poignant aspect of this exhibition is found in this area. “Souls of Our Students” was developed with the Mecklenburg Ministries, an interfaith organization, with the help of high school students. This video tackles the issue of bullying throughout Charlotte classrooms, as students created a video that explained the dynamics of bullying and the dangers of stereotyping. A full-length video of “Souls” is now used across Mecklenburg and Charlotte schools.

Audio: Dimly lit, this area also shows black silhouette cut-outs of a family whose father and mother are undocumented workers. They freely speak about how they feel society and the community see them and ultimately judge them.

Post-it Boards Asks: Another opportunity for visitors to offer feedback, this post-it board asks, “Who judges you without knowing you? Who do you judge?”<sup>55</sup>



**Post-It Board**

### *5. Working Together*

Theme: Groups who have set out intentionally to create multi-cultural institutions.

Video: Focused around a conservative, evangelical Christian church, this video features church leaders who strive to create an inclusive environment by welcoming all races and cultures into their church. They emphasize that creating an inclusive environment does not mean agreeing on everything, but instead on focusing on one key issue and creating dialogue to change that one component.

Artifacts: A group of musicians in a band loaned the museum specific items that symbolize their different cultural heritages - such as a Baptist hymnal, African drum,

and a Styxx record.<sup>56</sup>

#### 6. *Talk to Strangers Park*

In the center of *Changing Places* sits a park, where visitors can gather to rest, reflect, and have conversations. Modeled after parks in Charlotte, where groups of all cultures gather, park benches with the words ‘Talk to Strangers’ in different languages offer a respite for visitors and an invitation to explore other cultures. A picnic table in the center also has games for participation: a box of conversation-starter cards and a game that matches hot sauces from all across the world. Newspapers from specific Charlotte ethnic groups and a bulletin board full of community event flyers are also in the park as a way for visitors to explore outside of the museum. A video talk-back booth that allows visitors to record their opinions about the exhibit is also present in the park. Their responses are available on a touch-screen next to the booth. Demographics of responses were diverse as half of the respondents were non-Caucasian and ranged in ages from the teens to the thirties. The booth encouraged privacy and allowed visitors to open up regarding the exhibit as well as the role of cultural diversity in their own lives. Clips from the booth were also used in collaboration with a local television station, which produced a one-hour documentary about *Changing Places*.<sup>57</sup>

Tom Hanchett writes in his essay that:

Each of the *Changing Places* exhibit areas conveyed a different emotional temperature – from the cozy and largely familiar Indian home, to the bright, commercial and exotic tienda, to the cool, dark and vaguely foreboding Push

Past Stereotypes – evoking the mixed emotions that we all feel as we cope with cultural differences. Areas 1, 3, 5 and 6 featured largely positive stories and design feel, while Areas 2 and 4 were more confrontational, with silhouettes, figures out of context, harsh lighting, and barriers to traffic flow. We wanted visitors to emotionally step into others’ shoes, seeing themselves readily in some areas, but also feeling the emotional uncertainty inherent in today’s swirl of cultural change.”<sup>58</sup>

### **Public Programming and Civic Dialogue**

The museum saw *Changing Places* as a tool for civic dialogue and a platform for discussion with visitors and the community. ‘Speaking of Change’ & ‘Turn the Tables’ were two roundtable discussions the museum created which tackled difficult issues with teens and adults. These sessions began with an orientation around the table and then participants spent forty minutes in the exhibition in silence. A time for reflection and sharing reactions of the exhibit with one other participant followed, with the session ending with a conversation with the entire group. “Talk moved from the personal (what touched you in the exhibit) toward what that organization might do for its community in this era of cultural change. People opened up emotionally, discussing fears and frustrations, concerns and ambivalence.”<sup>59</sup> These roundtable programs brought an amazing amount of community collaboration. Mecklenburg County made the roundtable discussions a part of their diversity training, bringing 400 employees to the museum. Henry County in Georgia, five hours away from

Charlotte, sent civic leaders to the museum to experience the exhibition by the busloads. Charlotte's Medic 911 found the roundtable discussions so useful that they incorporated their own roundtable discussions into their staff training. The Charlotte Symphony featured concerts in the museums, which also brought in international musicians that talked about the role of their cultures and music. One of the most inspirational examples of community involvement was the Piedmont Middle School. The principal proclaimed a *Changing Places* Day, and not having money for buses, the entire school walked half an hour to and from the museum to participate in three hours of programming.<sup>60</sup>

### **Community Collaboration**

As the research, planning, and design stages of *Changing Places* incorporated museum outreach and community collaboration, the end product included educational and public programming with the help of other community organizations. Some were already lined up, but many other organizations approached the museum asking to be involved. Other organizations were even inspired by *Changing Places* to create their own programming, but not involving the museum. Before the exhibition opened, a local folklorist, Ann Pegelow Kaplan, approached the museum to find an National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) grant to build a website for the exhibition. The museum did not have the staff or resources to complete this on their own. The NEA grant provided an invaluable service to the museum and overall exhibition and is still being used as a resource for teachers. In an effort to prepare



for the opening of the exhibition, the museum's educators organized cultural awareness exercises for the staff. LAC introduced a workshop on Charlotte's immigrant life as well, as local anthropology professors conducted role-play on stereotypes and introduced proxemics to the staff. The education staff at the museum also worked with a Teachers Advisory Panel to help write youth and adult tour scripts for docents. The UNC Charlotte became educational partners with the museum, as they hosted monthly public programming series at the museum. UNC also asked staff members at the museum to help train college instructors and professors as a part of their freshman curriculum, as it was to include community engagement. The museum used media collaboration as a way to market the museum and *Changing Places*, as well as a way to serve as an educational tool. While the museum could draw large numbers to the exhibition, the use of media could draw in even more. Communications Vice President Ashley Thurmond used local media to not only promote *Changing Places*, but to tell the story of what the exhibit was trying to do. *Charlotte Magazine* featured a story on cultural diversity as their cover story the same month as the exhibition opened, featuring specific stories from *Changing Places*. Teams from the museum, with collaboration from the *Charlotte Observer*, started an annual New South Barbecue Tour that featured barbeque from Asian and Latino local restaurants, which drew local and state coverage. Overall, several dozen Charlotte organizations and groups attended, participated, and collaborated with Levine. One of the main points to take away from this collaboration is that organizations found this exhibition so useful that they

incorporated some aspect of it into their own programs in some aspect.

### **Visitor Responses**

The video talkback booth elicited responses in which visitors mused out loud as they struggled to move beyond their preconceptions. One African-American gentleman talked about how he entered the exhibit feeling that only black people dealt with the burden of cultural disrespect. “But it’s not just about race, it’s not just about race.” Another couple, an African-American man and a Latina woman, who struggled with English, said, “We must get along and love one another. We’re working it out. You can too.”<sup>61</sup>

The University of North Carolina (UNC) Charlotte professors conducted an in-depth evaluation from the roundtable discussions held at the museum. They surveyed 1,285 people, observed twelve dialogue sessions, and did a follow-up online survey of sixty-three participants several months later. Of the respondents, 46% said that the “dialogue program changed their behavior around issues about cultural change and diversity in the community” to a moderate or great extent. Individual responses included:

“I was unaware of growth of diversity in Meck County.”

“I knew our community was diverse but generally thought about the traditional immigrant population, i.e. Latino, I had no idea of the scale of diversity.”

“We brought a group from church; the church is now exploring ways to enhance involvement with different cultures in the community. Having conversations together

in Levine's setting helped spark this initiative."<sup>62</sup>

### **Interview with Dr. Tom Hanchett, Staff Historian**

Wednesday, October 2, 2013

Dr. Hanchett's goal for the museum and for *Changing Places* was to talk about what was troubling in the community. His goal was to "use history and to add a new perspective to the issue of cultural diversity". The museum reached out to several community organizations to form partnerships to create *Changing Places* that included: TV documentaries, events and educational outreach. The museum tagline "Using history to build community" led the museum to form these partnerships to gauge the metrics of what was needed in the community. In the stages of exhibition development, the museum gave presentations to specific community members that could add value to the development. Media coverage was also used to gauge the needs in the community. The museum built an official media partnership with the local public radio station, as well as UNC Charlotte. These partnerships gave the museum greater access to determine what the community wanted to hear and see in *Changing Places*. When the exhibit opened, Dr. Hanchett was blown away by the support of the community, including the funding aspect of the project. All of the programming, civic dialogue, and educational resources that stemmed from *Changing Places*, both with the museum and on their own was more than the museum had anticipated. Further participations in dialogue with community leaders and the evaluation and research project led by UNC Charlotte has kept the exhibition

still present in the community and at the museum, even after three years of it ending. Dr. Hanchett sees the success of *Changing Places* as a guide for the museum and itself on how to handle serious community issues and how to effectively develop and design an exhibition.

## Conclusion

Levine Museum President, Emily Zimmern, focuses on four important lessons for museums to consider when handling difficult and controversial stories to tell in exhibitions.<sup>63</sup>

*1. Museums should not fear controversial matter – the fact that it is controversial means that it matters.*

Exhibitions have the power to create dialogue among visitors. They help us think and address complex issues. Allowing for people to share opinions and their own insights creates a platform for dialogue that would never be heard in day-to-day conversation.

*2. Partnerships with community groups are a powerful tool to spark synergies.*

While museums will always have their regular museum visitor, they also need to think about what groups or communities would like to be present in the exhibition. Creating specific audiences that would be interested in the conception, development, design process, and educational and public programming, allows museums to reach specific groups in making their exhibition and the topic relevant. Community collaboration is the first step in completing this goal.

*3. This does not mean that the Museum gives up its role as prime shaper of its message.*

It's the job of the trained museum staff to effectively create an exhibition that focuses around a community or conflicting issue. "Experts are essential in the task of turning an often formless community issues into a tangible exhibit/program experience. If anything this is harder with an idea-based exhibit, since there are no preset "exciting objects" to fall back on."<sup>64</sup>

*4. As a single institution, the Museum cannot solve a major societal problem. But through collaboration with like-minded cross-sector partners, it really can move the needle. As evaluation reports showed for Changing Places, people who participated say that their awareness has increased and that their attitudes and actions have changed.*

From the very beginning Levine collaborated with the community to seek out what people wanted to see in the exhibition. Their purpose was to tackle a local problem and create significant change with the use of their museum and exhibition content. They figured out what the community and populations wanted and needed to see and turned it into an incredibly successful exhibition. Further collaboration helped their public programming reach a wide audience who greatly benefited from the roundtable discussions. It's inspiring to see what a museum and its staff can achieve when careful planning and consideration of an idea is implemented into all stages of an exhibition.

## Chapter 8 – Recommendations for Museums

*Below is a collection of scholarly journal passages that I quote, as they offer advice to museums that pursue social change in their exhibitions and content design.*

“Moving Beyond the Mainstream: Insight into the Relationship between Community-Based Heritage Organizations and the Museum,” explores ways to advance engagement in communities and museum visitors by collaborating with community-based organizations in an effort to allow diverse cultures and their voices to be heard throughout the museum and into society. “Such collaborations can help further access and inclusion with regards to diversifying audiences of the “mainstream” museums and, at the same time, they can also interrogate the museums’ narrative which support and perpetuates its position of authority.”<sup>65</sup> Community-based organizations allow diverse populations to creatively express their heritage, while also promoting inclusion and allowing them to maintain cultural traditions.

Simona Bodo speaks of:

The prevailing understandings of a museum’s responsibility to promote intercultural dialogue by encouraging increased knowledge and greater recognition and appreciation of ‘other’ cultures. While this approach may take very different forms, what often distinguished these initiatives is not so much a will to encourage attendance and participation on the part of migrant communities, as to promote a ‘knowledge-orientated multiculturalism’ directed principally at an indigenous public.<sup>66</sup>

Bodo gives advice on how to create a stronger intercultural dialogue between communities and in our museums.

1. Utilize a static, essentialist notion of heritage, which is primarily seen as a “received patrimony” to safeguard and transmit.
2. Generally target communities exclusively in relation to their own cultures and collections, while cross-cultural interaction across all audiences is generally avoided.
3. By keeping “majority” and “minority” cultures and communities apart-and by generally treating the latter as “unified, traditional, unchanging and thereby exotic” they sometimes operate to reinforce rather than to challenge stereotypes.
4. They are inclined to embrace the rhetoric of ‘diversity as a richness’ rather than acknowledging and confronting tensions and frictions between communities.
5. Generally based on an understanding of “intercultural dialogue” as a goal to be attained rather than as a process ingrained in a museum’s practice through which it might promote “multiple visions and interpretations.”<sup>67</sup>

In *Visitor Voices in Museums Exhibitions*, Kathleen McLean and Wendy Polluck talk about another set of influences that have come from cultural studies and the view of museums as not just resources for individual learning, but places where meaning is negotiated on a cultural scale. These are sites of “multiple and heterogeneous

borders...where different histories, languages, experiences, and voices intermingle amidst diverse relations of power and privilege.”<sup>68</sup>

Studies carried out in Australia and Canada probe perceptions of the museum’s social role. What has been found is that most people think museums have a social responsibility to represent controversial topics, and nearly all see museums as places that should allow visitors to offer feedback and participate in civic dialogue. “We should be thinking of participation, cooperation, and partnership not only as altruistic acts and conditions of a democratic society, but also as elements of a sound and sustainable economic model.”<sup>69</sup>

The research asked about visitor feedback and what are visitors’ motivations were to read and write in the museum setting.<sup>70</sup>

#### *What are visitor’s motivations to write?*

*An Outlet for Anger:* Specific points raised in the exhibition appears to have acted as a catalyst for visitors to express opinions drawn from their own knowledge, experience, and prejudices.

*A Wish to cause Change:* Visitors seem to be motivated by the belief that their comments would be read by manufacturers and policy makers.

#### *What are Visitors’ Motivations to Read?*

*Language:* First motive to read comments concerns the style and language used by visitors when expressing themselves.



*Balance:* Concerned with bias. Visitors value books of comments as an essential component of the exhibitions, as it was perceived as a method of redressing the imbalance felt in the overall exhibition.

*A Novel Point of View:* Visitors valued discussion exhibitions as they allowed issues to be tackled from the point of view of the visitor rather than that of a scientist, exhibit developer, or manufacturer.

Margaret Kadoyama focuses on why effective, meaningful dialogue is difficult, as well as the act of listening. She offers several skills that museums can use to enhance dialogue and listening. Her research examines how dialogue can have a purpose and achieve a goal. Her recommendations are to:<sup>71</sup>

- Teach skills and model the potential for respectful listening to elicit people's thinking as distinct from the opinions they often repeat. Good listening leads to deeper understanding, and a trained facilitator can help make that happen.
- A good facilitator understands group dynamics, respects participants, listens attentively and sensitively, suspends his or her own opinions and provides a safe environment for participants to share their stories.
- A good facilitator serves as a guide for a group, managing group process and dynamics, and ensuring that group members feel free to fully participate. Skillful facilitation is a critical component of meaningful civic dialogue, and museums with this goal in mind will need to include this as part of their programs.

- Another way to create deeply engaging institutions is to build strong relationships with community members who are skilled in facilitating difficult dialogue.
- The importance of dialogue within organizations is to create inclusive institutions. These include asking questions relevant to the people engaged in the dialogue, having a facilitator who can help people find common ground, and who can create a safe environment for people with different backgrounds, and listening with an open mind.”

## **Chapter 9 – Conclusion**

Examples of three museums effectively using specific content, design, and interpretation in exhibition design have created these outlets that visitors and the community desire. While museums are not the only approach to fostering change and new behaviors in a community, they are instrumental given that the public gives them the power to do so. Museums are able to create exhibitions that offer powerful messages and elicit dialogue and collaboration, because the public asks and expects them to do so. These case studies are vastly different. On one end you have the Museum of Free Derry that tells one-side of a story. An important story to tell as it has been silenced for decades but nonetheless incredibly powerful and beneficial to the community. In this sense, a museum acts as a sounding board for the community and those that died in the events of Bloody Sunday. Dialogue is created within the walls of the museum as visitors are able to experience content, photographs and artifacts donated by the community as it struggles to rebuild their future and tell about their past. The Museum of Memory and Tolerance gives an historical overview of genocides while using art as a tool to create empathy. Visitors are then able to create dialogue with themselves and others as they work their way through the tolerance interactives. This type of museum acts as a classroom by giving visitors historical knowledge and then giving them tools to critically apply it to their own lives. Finally, we have the Levine Museum of the New South that would be on the opposite end compared to the MoFD. Levine uses community collaboration in order to tell everyone's story. It allows all voices to be heard in the exhibition, which

provides ways to create dialogue with the visitors. This type of museum acts as a community center as it welcomes all and strives to include all. Each museum is different in their approach, but all offer successful examples that can be applied to other museums.

Robert Janes, in his essay, "Museums, Social Responsibility and the Future We Desire," outlines out four key values of socially responsible museums:<sup>72</sup>

*Idealism:* Thinking about the way things could be, and then taking action, rather than simply accepting the way things are. This striving for constant improvement lies at the heart of social responsibility.

*Intimacy:* Communication. Quality communication lies in direct experience, there is no substitute for human relationships, and all the time, energy, and attention these relationships require.

*Depth:* Being thorough and complete, even when this requires a tremendous investment of time and resources. Investing enormous amounts of staff time in building relationships with particular groups of people, all in an effort to try to understand what is important. Depth is about thinking, questions and reflecting, and taking the time to do this.

*Interconnectedness:* The growing societal awareness of the deep connections between well-being and families, organizations, the environment and the whole of humanity. Well-being is fundamentally linked to the health of society and the natural environment. What are the requirements for an institution that would like to participate in socially responsible work? There needs to be a shared purpose.

Boards of directors, staff, supporters and the community must have an understanding of the museum's purpose, and the commitment to social responsibility must be clearly stated as part of the museum's purpose. There must be a need for active experimentation and taking of risks. Most innovation occurs from hundreds of small changes and ideas which add up to enormous differences, and this kind of thinking must be encouraged, recognizing that there are never too many ideas. Finally, there is openness. Openness is important in order that tensions might be addressed proactively and creatively so that boards, staff, and volunteers feel free to discuss their values and beliefs. Research and studies confirm that the public values museums as institutions that can act as catalysts for change.

*"When we share with visitors—in demonstrations, in other programs, on the exhibit floor—the idea is opening up, listening, understanding what is going on, and being humble. Our job is not to see what we can teach people. It's to find what they can teach all of us. We need to get it straight that understanding is what we need to engender and what we owe to each other. It is the work of love."*

**Vishnu Ramcharan: Ontario Science Center**

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