"Social Media and the Power to Effect Change: The Impact of the Digital Landscape on Achieving Equity Within Art Museum Leadership and Visitorship"

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Introduction

Art museums in the United States are not exempt from the current social and political divisiveness of our times. Recent events within the art world have revealed a call to action for museums to no longer be neutral institutions, but instead take a more active role in promoting social justice narratives, being the redistribution of power, influence, and value,[1] in order to maintain relevance within society and resolve a historic lack of diversity. Controversies in the United States surrounding new curatorial hires, discourse on representation, and shocking studies which reveal a lack of people of color visiting museums all demonstrate an immediate need for diversity initiatives. At the same time, barriers within the physical museum space and educational tracks further inhibit people of color from proliferating as visitors and in obtaining curatorial leadership roles. This call to action has resulted in a reimagining of museums, their practices, and the roles of curators in order to better serve the needs of an increasingly diverse society. Museums have identified these systemic issues regarding diversity, however, no initiatives have been able to successfully solve the problem. However, most recently, where museums have historically struggled to diversify their leadership and

visitorship, online phenomena have demonstrated the ability for social media to realize museum diversification initiatives. Through social media, those who have otherwise been excluded from the art world are given a voice to challenge museums, promote activist initiatives toward equity in the curatorial field, and change the museum landscape toward better and equitable representations, making museum spaces more accessible overall. Diversification within leadership and visitorship in American art museums, therefore, can be actualized through the utilization of the digital landscape.

Visitorship: Demographics & Theories

Recent studies conducted by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) reveal that "by 2033 people of color would make up forty six percent of the country's population, and yet they would still represent only nine percent of museums' core visitors."[2] This projection reveals that despite society itself becoming more incredibly diverse, and museums having an obligation to fulfill cultural and societal demands, they are still catering to a traditionally white audience and putting their own relevancy as institutions at risk.[3] White audiences currently account for the majority of art museum visitors in the U.S. However,

this is not because of a lack of interest in museum going among minority groups. For example, the National Museum of African American History and Culture has seen unprecedented visitor numbers, participation, and time spent within the museum since opening its doors in 2016. Beginning with a well-planned social media strategy in 2012, the museum targeted online audiences through Facebook lead-ads, and thereby attributes much of their success upon opening to their commitment to targeting visitors online before they reached the front doors.[4] As a result of their rigorous Facebook outreach, the museum sold out opening weekend tickets within an hour, and tickets were completely sold out through the end of 2016.[5] Visitors could be seen waiting outside as early as three a.m. with the hope of securing a ticket,[6] demonstrating the desire for representation of the African American narrative within history museums, despite low visitor rates from this demographic within the arts. These staggering visitor and desirability rates, combined with the visitor stay period of upwards of six hours (compared to the forty-five-minute dwell time most museums retain visitors for)[7] show a desire for the inclusion of narratives of people of color that are mostly missing within art museums. It additionally

reveals how addressing representations of people of color, or lack thereof, can benefit museum patronage greatly.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts revealed that non-hispanic white Americans made up 78.9 percent of art museum visitors, while accounting for just 68.7 percent of the U.S. population.[8] Thus, display that white visitors are overrepresented in total visitorship. Visitors identifying as Hispanic made up 8.6 percent of museum visitors, and account for 13.5 percent of the total U.S. population. While visitors identifying as African American makeup 5.9 percent of total visitors and 11.4 percent of the country's population, revealing minority backgrounds were underrepresented respectively. In attempting to find cultural and social reasons behind these shocking and problematic numbers, the survey attributes "historically-grounded cultural barriers to participation that make museums feel intimidating and exclusionary to many people". It also goes on to state that: "the lack of specialized knowledge and a cultivated aesthetic taste ('cultural capital') to understand and appreciate what are perceived by many as elite art forms, especially in art museums"[9] contribute to the lack of minority representation within visitorship.

Such historically-grounded cultural barriers resulting in intimidation and exclusion are evident in what museum consultant and theorist Elaine Heumann Gurian terms 'threshold fear'. Threshold fear is the idea that there are both physical and programmatic barriers causing difficulty for people of color to initiate the museum experience. Once a term used in the field of psychology, Gurian re-appropriates it to express the felt constraints impeding individuals from entering the museum space. Physically, a museum's location and architecture heavily influence who enters and interacts with the space. When museums have large, sophisticated architecture, they attract the "typical affluent educated museum-goer who is much impressed with the current architectural emphasis of museum buildings."[10] While recent architectural projects for cultural buildings favor ultra-modern, sophisticated, and structurally elaborate buildings to house their collections, such as the Broad contemporary art museum in Los Angeles, they can intimidate visitors and foster a sense of exclusion. Museums should be "interested in hospitable and less intimidating spaces, a plethora of easily locatable human amenities, and wayfinding that is understandable."[11] Rather than "[asserting] monumentality and make their

presentation as revered but not necessarily comfortable icons"[12] to attract those audiences historically reluctant to cross the threshold. Beyond a museum's architecture, buildings must also be geographically convenient in order to achieve equity. Museums should "either incorporate or [be] adjacent to public transport"[13] to be most successful. Additionally, as "mixed-use spaces providing exhibitions, programmes, restaurants and cafes, shopping, and party spaces under one roof"[14] museums would appeal to a broader population and cause art museums to become less of tourist destinations, which Gurian believes attracts traditional audiences, and more integrated into their respective communities.

As civic spaces, museums close themselves off from the public in curious ways. In addition to physical barriers, Gurian also attributes threshold fear to more latent barriers that go beyond getting audiences through the door. Anxieties arise when one must enter the museum space and reveal personal information about themselves among a majority population of white visitors. Upon entering the space, visitors feel that they must reveal that they "can afford the price of admission," "dress and behave superficially in order to be allowed to remain in the building," and

"if they visit during weekday hours, assumptions will be made that they are on holiday, unemployed, retired, a student, or somehow not in the workforce."[15] All of these factors contribute to minority visitors' reluctance to cross the threshold of the physical museum space. The presence of security guards, small and centralized entrances, limited hours, and confusing self-navigation are all aspects of the museum-going experience that Gurian contributes to being "high threshold" and anxiety inducing for the unfamiliar visitor. Gurian suggests that museums should model themselves after conventional shopping malls in order to better attract diverse visitors. This would allow visitors to enter inconspicuously and anonymously through many different entrances with more covert surveillance, facilitate easy access to familiar services (i.e. bathrooms) and become welcoming to large multi-generational groups in order to encourage socializing.

The second attribution to low visitor rates as revealed in the NEA Survey is an issue concerning equity and access to formal arts education. A lack of a sophisticated arts education begins in most public schools, as "many members of the middle and working class are denied an understanding and appreciation of art that would allow them to be a part

of museum culture."[16] As a result, museums have become cultural symbols of a self-serving system in which the upper class elite attain the arts education, beginning in adolescence at school. Then going on to fund and work within the arts institutions, making theirs the dominant voice. The elite become the stewards of our cultural history through art, giving them license to "dictate the values of society,"[17] despite museums being responsible for representing and being stewards of the cultural heritages' of all.

The disparity between the demographics of museum visitors and actual diversity within American communities calls into question the relevance and success of museums as civic spaces. The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) identified "diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in all aspects of museums' structure and programming"[18] to be issues at the top of their priority list in their 2016-20 strategic plan. Following this strategic plan, the AAM assembled a team focused on diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. Over a six month period, the teams "examined the characteristics of effective museum inclusion practices and considered what steps the field could take to promote DEAI."[19] The AAM reported the following assertions

to be central to promoting DEAI in every museum:

1. "Every museum professional must do personal work to face their unconscious bias

2. Debate on definitions must not hinder progress

3. Inclusion is central to the effectiveness and sustainability of museums

4. Systemic change is vital to long-term, genuine progress

5. Empowered, inclusive leadership is essential at all levels of an organization."[20]

While the report does not practically apply these DEAI initiatives and assertions, the group encouraged social media mobilization of museum professionals to share their responses to the following questions: "What are you most proud of in your work on diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion? What are your greatest obstacles to this work? What resources do you need? What does success look like for the feld?"[21] Professionals attending the 2017 AAM conference were asked to respond to these questions using the hashtag #museuminclusion, to which there were over 485,000 Twitter responses.[22] While it is evident that underrepresented groups are reluctant to initiate the museum experience in the physical world, there is a growing online community of people of color who are interested in the art world. They are utilizing social media platforms to create spaces in which they can view art that is reflective of their lived experiences, proving their interest in art viewing. This is an important phenomena that museums must pay attention to and incorporate within their own spaces. Twenty-eight-year-old curator Kimberly Drew, Instagram user @MuseumMammy and social media manager for the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET), works to use social media to connect audiences with contemporary black artists, creating an almost living and breathing online exhibition of the black experience within art. She shares with her over 233,000 Instagram followers art that works to "[bridge] the gap between underrepresented artistic voices and museum spaces."[23]In 2011, Drew launched Black Contemporary Art, a blog dedicated to sharing works by artists of color aimed at connecting people curious about black art. However, they are incapable to find a centralized outlet to do so with pieces that

are relevant to their own lived experiences. Drew recognized the need for representation within museum space, and created an online resource to accomplish this. As of 2016, Black Contemporary Art had over 200,000 active followers.[24] It is clear, therefore, that people of color want to participate in museum-going and art viewing, however, the lack of representation they feel within traditional art museums makes them reluctant to initiate the experience. Instead, they have created online spaces that are representative of the art that they wish to see.

When considering visitor demographics and the warranted reluctance of minority visitors to initiate the museum-going experience, the lack of diversity and representation of people of color is dramatic, problematic, and deeply concerning. Art museums cannot function as true civic spaces in service of their communities if they do not reflect the needs, values, and demographics of the communities in which they serve. Therefore, art museums within the United States must "seek to mirror the country's demographic transformation and become fully inclusive of the interests of their diverse communities,"[25] as this is "critical to the continued vitality of art museums as

public resources for a democratic society."[26]

Curatorship: Education & Contemporary Phenomena

Curation, always an integral yet formerly behind-the-scenes arts profession, has recently dominated popular culture and permeated the laypersons vernacular. Within the profession itself, challenges to traditional educational pathways toward curatorial careers and a mass marketing of a curatorial education are changing the intellectual landscape of museology as a whole. Additionally, the field has faced historical issues concerning a lack of diversity and its relationship with a museums intellectual authority. The realities of pursuing a career in art history and curatorship, being the high costs of degrees, small program sizes, necessary unpaid internships and meager salaries, favor the privileged. As a result, the profession tends to attract, if not serve entirely, those who are white and a part of the cultural elite, perpetuating historic traditions of who museums belong to and, in turn, who they serve.

In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the idea and practice of exhibitions curated by academically trained art historians became the standard mode and context for viewing art, particular

artists, and entire collections. This changed the culture surrounding the presentation and context in which art was shown, creating the first instances of what we now consider to be an act of intellectual authority, which is now paramount to the role of a twenty-first century curator. This intellectual authority inherently shapes the way visitors experience art within museums and the messages they receive, while disseminating and dictating cultural narratives at large.

Acting as the caretakers and stewards of museum collections, curators are charged with the display of a museum's collection, how they should interact with one another, how they should interact with the viewer, and how and what the viewer should take from them. In large institutions, as specialists in a particular medium and period of art, curators acquire, research, educate, and disseminate information for and to the public regarding the works within their care, involving the creation of exhibition themes and their presentation. Famed curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, the current the director at Serpentine Galleries in London, sees himself as both a partner to artists and utmost as a caretaker. He attributes four things especially to successful curatorship: preservation, selection of new work, a

connection to art history, and displaying work.[27]

Curating has developed into a career that requires intense academic and practical training, elevating the profession to be one of the most prestigious and important leadership roles within a museum's hierarchical structure. Most high ranking curatorial positions at medium to large institutions require a PhD in art history combined with years of practical experience working in museums and/or galleries, along with extensive contacts of artists and other professionals for creating exhibitions and elevating the status of the institution they represent overall. Now, however, universities are changing the academic landscape of the career track in creating entire curatorial graduate programs in an effort to provide students not only with an art history background, but also with business and administrative skills. Beyond the traditional rigorous academic scholarship, most notably, and heavily marketed, are the networking opportunities these programs promise to provide.

Although these new, exciting programs have captured the attention of many hopefuls seeking a career in the arts, institutions and seasoned curators in the field are skeptical, if not completely doutbful, of such programs. These two-year curating MA programs

"on average… will set one back roughly $40,000 per academic year"[28] in the United States, boasting a high cost for what many consider to be a pay-for-networking program, rather than academically challenging intellectual work in the study of art history. As reported in 2017, with entry-level curatorial assistant positions beginning at a meager $42,458 annual salary, assistant curators positions at $55,999,[29] and experienced art history college graduates reporting an 8.8 percent unemployment rate,[30] this tuition is largely inaccessible and unrealistic to many. While the networking resources provided by curatorial programs have helped many young curators, such as Ruba Katrib of the SculptureCenter who attended the Bard Center for Curatorial Studies,[31] skyrocket to success post-graduation, most practicing curators assert that "if you want to succeed as a curator, you must begin with a solid grounding in art history."[32] Many professionals agree that technical, administrative skills such as "how to write an exhibition checklist or a loan agreement"[33] are best learned on the job, with classroom time dedicated to understanding the breadth of the art historical canon and developing one's specialization. Skeptics of such programs not only question the academic capabilities of its graduates, but also the intentions of the

programs themselves. Eva Respini, the chief curator at the ICA Boston, sees curatorial MA programs as "money-making ventures to support PhD programs"[34] rather than institutions committed to producing scholars in the field of art history. Their high price and perceived exclusivity foster negative connotations for many curators who believe a strong art history program is key to successful curatorship.

The American Alliance of Museums recognizes diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion, with specific respect to museum's internal leadership structure and influence on the institution's intellectual authority, as being the most pressing issues in today's diverse society. Due to the fact that curating shapes the shared cultural narrative through how visitors interact with art and what art they interact with, it is paramount for museums to diversify the voices within their curatorial staff to better serve their communities. Practices must be reexamined and reimagined within current social and political climate in order to preserve the legacy and social function of museums as institutions entirely. A survey conducted in 2015 by Ithaka S+R on behalf of the Andrew Mellon Foundation which studied the racial demographics of museum employees and found that among the aggregate of

institutions studied at the leadership level (defined as Curators, Conservators, Educators), 84 percent of employees identified as white (non-Hispanic), 3 percent white (Hispanic), 0 percent American Indian, 6 percent Asian, 4 percent African American, 0 percent Native Hawaiian, and 3 percent as two or more races.[35] These numbers vary among job categories with the most diversity seen in the security and facilities staffs, while curatorial departments were reported to be approximately 90 percent white. From these findings, it appears that more specialized departments with higher educational requirements are predominately white. These numbers also vary slightly in consideration of age and birth year, as "younger employee cohorts appear to be somewhat more diverse."[36] Among employees holding leadership positions born in the 1930's, 20 percent accounted for underrepresented minorities while 80 percent identified as white (non-Hispanic). This sector grows slightly more diverse in later decades, as in the 1980's and 90's underrepresented minority groups grew to around 30 percent. Leadership roles, therefore, are slightly more diverse among younger generations, however, only most recently by a 10 percent margin.

Curatorship has now come to involve activism and acts of social justice as society grows more and more diverse and cultural needs shift. While recent events within the arts have shed light on the need for diversity within the professional world, curators and their exhibitions have been stirring up controversy for decades. Curation, in practice, is subjective in nature. One must be mindful, cautious, and well-informed when creating an exhibition due to the inherent authoritative voice a curator assumes. By deciding which pieces are worth showing, which voices within society are most important and should be given platforms, and judging what is and is not good art, curators are inherently charged with creating our cultural artistic narrative.

Unsurprisingly, curators have misstepped in the process and misrepresented or taken an unwarranted voice in practice. Beginning in the 1960's and 70's, people of color began to challenge large institutions' commitment to representation and their relevance, looking specifically at well-respected Western collections. The infamous "Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968" exhibition at the MET in 1969 became a catalyst for this and for the accountability of those in roles of cultural stewardship. In this

exhibit, photographs of life within the largely African American, Harlem community were exhibited; however, no black artists were represented. It was an exotification of the lived experiences of an already marginalized community, and the MET, rather than showcasing black artists from Harlem, exhibited large photo murals of an outsider's perspective of Harlem. The exhibit was immediately criticized in the press and by the Harlem community for not only being a misrepresentation, but also for being a blatant reinforcement of the power structures favoring the white perspective within the arts. At the time, the MET's director, Thomas Hoving, called the exhibition an "error in judgement," but this could not reconcile the decisions made by the curator cultivating such a patronizing and ethnocentric show, taking the power away from black artists to tell their own stories.

Although curators have since used the MET's unfortunate exhibit on Harlem as a cautionary tale, institutions still continue to repeat the same mistakes when it comes to representing people of color, both as artists and as subjects within art. Since 2008, "2.4 percent of all acquisitions and gifts and 7.6 percent of all exhibitions at 30 prominent American museums have been of work by African American artists."[37] In 2016, "80.5 percent of artists represented by [45 New York City] galleries [were] white,"[38] demonstrating the need for black representation within the art being shown. The 2017 Whitney Biennial sparked a major controversy when curators chose to display the workOpen Casket by Dana Schutz, a painting based on a famous photograph of Emmett Till, a black boy who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955 for being falsely accused of accosting a white female. Till's mother chose to have an open casket at her sons funeral to showcase the brutality of the racism that existed within America, and the subsequent photos of Till's open casket published by the press became a key catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement. Over 50 years later, this painting of the famous photograph done by a white, female artist did not sit well with many attendees of the Biennial, their main criticism being that the painting exploited black suffering and that the artist, not being a member of the black community, had no right to comment on the event. Unlike "Harlem on My Mind", critics of this event turned to social media to voice their concerns, and the event itself soon went viral. The Biennial was now on the public's radar, and everyone could have a say in the conversation surrounding whether or not the painting should continue to be

displayed. Once again, the public saw curators and institutions showcasing and giving attention to art that tells a narrative of the black community from an outside perspective. Thus, in favor of one that told a patronizing, exotifying, and sensationalizing for the profit and benefit of another, all while taking opportunities away from real black artists. This time, however, their voices could not be ignored.

In consideration of the role of the curator being one committed to showing new artists, one can see how this can prove to be a contentious decision if the art itself and the artist's message does not reflect society's needs. The curator, therefore, is no longer simply an objective tastemaker. Jamillah James, curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, describes her role as a curator as being more aligned with activism, stating that her, "commitment is still very much to giving voice to artists of color, women and queer-identified artists within institutions, and foregrounding their contributions in art historical discourse."[39] James sees using the "curatorial platform for advocacy and activism"[40] as both a responsibility and an honor that has great influence on society. James sees potential in playing "the liaison between the public and artists by way of interpretation and presentation" in order "to respond to societal issues"[41] through the creation of exhibitions.

The role of curator as activist is a recent phenomenon stemming from both societal needs and museums no longer seeing themselves as neutral institutions. Curator and arts writer Maura Reilly sees curatorial activism as being "the practice of organizing art exhibitions with the principle aim of ensuring that certain constituencies of artists are no longer ghettoized or excluded from the master narratives of art,". She believes it focuses "almost exclusively on work produced by women, artists of color, non-Euro-Americans, and/or queer artists"[42] toward "leveling hierarchies, challenging assumptions, countering erasure, promoting the margins over the center, the minority over the majority, as well as positing curatorial "strategies of resistance," provoking intelligent debate, and disseminating new knowledge, which, in the end, offers up signs of hope and affirmation."[43] This new phenomena of curatoratorial activism both seeks to challenge and repair the prevailing white, Western male viewpoint found in the art historical canon while uplifting and giving platforms to those historically underrepresented and marginalized voices.

Not only must the curator see themself as an activist, but they must be representative of the communities in which they serve. In 2017, the Brooklyn Museum faced backlash for hiring a white female as their new curator of African art. The activist group Decolonize This Place said in a letter to the museum that the hire "reflects deeper structural flaws within this museum's culture in particular and in the field, more generally."[44] This incident went "viral" on social media, and created a dialogue among people of color surrounding the best practices of museums in telling their history and who should have that voice. It brought attention to issues of diversity in the arts at the professional level, and social media activism allowed groups who otherwise would not to have a voice. The largely negative response on social media by museum professionals, visitors, and laypersons alike was not a target at this particular individual, but rather at the historic institutional structures which allow for a lack of people of color within the profession to assume these positions. In an interview with Newsweek, Steven Nelson, an African and African American art history professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, revealed that "the field of African art history in the U.S. is largely white and female,"[45] demonstrating a structural inequality leading to a lack of representation in the professional field.

Social Media & The Digital World: Access & Equity

Art museums, in recent years, have quickly adapted to the social media landscape in order to broaden their reach and appeal to younger audiences. Boasting high follower rates, many large institutions are employing strategic methods in order to best utilize social media. For example, since 2011, the Art Institute of Chicago has experienced a boom in their social media presence, as "their Facebook followers jumped to around 447,000 from 55,000... on Twitter, followers have increased to 159,000 from 25,000... [and they have] over 100,000 Instagram followers."[46] Communication, connection, and interaction with the public has grown immensely through the utilization of social media platforms. In larger institutions, museums have hired communications professionals for social media leadership roles in which strategic methods are employed to capitalize on this social phenomenon.

While it is clear that museums struggle to promote diversity and an inclusion of voices within their internal leadership and service of the public, there is no lack of diversity online and through

social media. As online communication becomes "democratized," "the power has been taken from those in marketing and public relations by the individuals and communities that create, share, and consume blogs, tweets, Facebook entries, movies, pictures, and so forth… communication about brands happens, with or without permission of the firms in question."[47] The museum, therefore, no longer holds the solitary authoritative voice. Their followers dictate the content they wish to see and hold direct communication with the institution through the digital world. Most recently, this can be seen in instances of museums being held accountable for their hiring and exhibition decisions. In consideration of the interplay between the institution and the public on social media, the public at large now has a greater stake in museum practices.

Social media has allowed for underrepresented audiences in particular to have a voice where they historically have not. Due to the fact that sixty-nine percent of Americans use at least one social media platform, a drastic increase from five percent in 2005,[48] social media is generally representative of the actual American population. While people of color are largely underrepresented in the physical museum space, racial equity can be seen in social media use among

the public. In 2018, seventy-two percent of Americans identifying as Hispanic and 69 percent of Americans identifying as African American use at least one social media site, Facebook and Instagram being the most frequented and populated platforms, both of which allow for free and direct interactions between users, including direct messaging, liking posts and commenting. Urban populations, also largely underrepresented in the physical museum space, account for the largest geographic and socioeconomic groups of social media users, with seventy-five percent of the urban population using Facebook versus sixty-seven percent within the suburban sector.[49]

The ways in which people of color are using social media drastically differ from that of the white American population. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center reveals that "black social media users (68 percent) are roughly twice as likely as whites (35 percent) to say that at least some of the posts they see on social networking sites are about race or race relations," and within their own posting "among black social media users, 28 percent say most or some of what they post is about race or race relations; 8 percent of whites say the same". While only "roughly two-thirds (67 percent) of whites who use

social media say that none of things they post or share pertain to race."[50] People of color are turning to social media as a tool for voicing issues within their communities, forming bonds, and activism. With public and institutional social media users dramatically increasing in recent years, these platforms "have provided new arenas for national conversations about race and racial inequality."[51] Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have provided online spaces to discuss the intersection of race and cultural phenomena. This reveals the relevancy of social media as a space to have open and public discussions surrounding racial inequality to promote social equity, a tool museums may utilize to help solve historical issues of representation within their collections and practices.

Museums are using social media accounts to directly communicate with and connect to the digital public, establishing personalized contact between the institution and individual followers and increasing transparency. These accounts can be purely informative in nature or specified in their voice and approach. Additionally, the social activism seen on social media has pushed museums to no longer have a neutral voice and to engage in dialogues surrounding social justice. Although not an art museum, the Field Museum has become an

excellent example of the ways in which cultural institutions can use social media to promote inclusion. The museum's sixty-seven-million-year-old tyrannosaurus rex specimen, Sue, has always been a celebrity in their own right due to being the largest specimen of their species ever found. However, in recent years Sue has become a personified Twitter phenomenon, perhaps becoming the first museum artifact turned online celebrity. Boasting over 47,600 followers, her official account uses informal jargon, online humor, and, most importantly, activism to appeal to her followers. Breaking the traditional expectations of formality for official museum press, @SUEtheTrex utilizes gifs, memes, emojis, and other informal modes of internet humor to inform and educate her followers on topics rooted in history and science, demonstrating the successful interplay between online communication and the traditional goals of a museum.

Most notably, Sue is not neutral in regards to social activism. Sue uses gender-neutral pronouns and lists their preferred "they/them" in their Twitter bio. Named after the scientist that discovered them, Sue's gender has not been able to be identified by scientists, and the Field Museum used this as an opportunity to bring social issues and

dialogues into their framework as an institution. Sue, as an official representative of the museum, often engages in dialogues with fans surrounding their preferred pronouns and corrects those who mis-gender them. The Field Museum, as an institution, confirmed Sue's preferred pronouns in an official press release and asserted that the specimen be addressed as such. This resulted in positive feedback from the non-binary community, as they saw this as an act of inclusion and increased representation for them in cultural spaces. Additionally, the Field Museum took major steps in promoting gender inclusion within their staff, offering workshops and training sessions for employees to better "understand the importance, develop comfort with using gender-neutral pronouns" while creating "empathy for nonbinary colleagues and patrons."[52] Twitter activism, therefore, became a catalyst for actualized inclusion initiatives within the museum space and their internal hierarchical structure, revealing the importance of social media for social equity within the museum space.

Increasingly, museums are attempting to broaden the reach of their collections through the use of digital platforms to showcase their collections. Recent initiatives to digitize museum collections in an effort to increase accessibility make museum going possible for groups unable to reach the physical space. Many museums, small and large, have created digital open-access platforms in which objects from their collections have been digitized with contextual information and scholarship. The anonymity, convenience, and lack of intervention of a physical space make digital collections appealing to students, researchers, and young people who may not have a formal arts education and therefore feel uncomfortable in the ritualized museum space. In 2009, the MET established their Digital Media Department, for which "websites were built, collections were digitized, apps were launched, digital content was produced, social media accounts multiplied."[53] Similar digital departments can be seen at other art institutions comparable in size, and their range of initiatives is robust. These departments incorporate educators, curators, communications experts, and other professionals to create an interdisciplinary team of professionals working to bridge the gap between the digital and real world. Museums are now seeing the internet "as a thing that annihilates place, making it possible to be here, there and everywhere."[54] Through their digital collections, the MET aims to make their world renowned collections as accessible as

possible to anyone in the world. Their Chief Digital Officer affirmed in an interview with the New York Times that "most of the people who are interested in art aren't going to get on a plane and come here. It would be great if they came. But it's O.K. if what we're doing is reaching them in just a digital way."[55] The United States Census Bureau reported in 2015 that "62 percent of American households had 'high connectivity,' meaning they had three key computer and Internet items: a desktop or laptop, a handheld computer or smartphone, and a broadband Internet subscription."[56] Therefore, such efforts by major institutions like the MET to digitize their collections prove to make art more accessible to the public through how prevalent the digital world is in most American's lives.

Internet and social media have also proven to be important vehicles for museum professionals to connect and build community amongst themselves. A traditionally insular and niche profession, the establishment of online communities by and between museum professionals has helped strengthen bonds and form alliances between curators and museum leaders around the world, connecting them and their shared initiatives toward diversity. Established in 2015, Museum Hue, "an arts platform for

people of color (African, Latin, Asian, Middle-Eastern, Native American and Pacific Island descent),"[57] has created a robust online and in-person community of museum professionals working toward diversity initiatives. In-person events such as tours, workshops, and mixers work to create "meaningful experiences for people of color in museums and other cultural enclaves."[58] Most notably, however, the community built by Museum Hue has extended into the digital world in a meaningful way. With Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram platforms, each respectively boasting followers in the thousands, the organization posts about important issues concerning diversity in the arts in an effort to promote representation and inclusion at the leadership level. Museum Hue's Facebook group is comprised of "750 members around the country" and is "geared toward helping people of color find jobs, residencies, artist resources, and opportunities in the field."[59] The group has created a successful "networking and support group that offers members timely information on job offers as well as savvy career coaching, including résumé editing and counseling"[60] for those interested in diversifying the museum field. Monica Montgomery, co-founder of Museum Hue and director at the Lewis H. Latimer

Historic Houseand the Museum of Impact, credits " the successful hire of between 10 and 12 people at museums or arts organizations"[61] to the Facebook group. In addition to Museum Hue, online communities of museum professionals exist across almost all social media platforms. The Reddit subgroup MuseumPros hosts 4,700 followers, posting on a range of topics concerning museum best practices, career and higher education advice, and even issues of diversity within the professional field. Users have inquired about the neutrality of other museums and the ethics of applying to a curator of African Art position as a white individual, among other issues concerning diversity within museum leadership structure. These online cohorts have proven to provide professionals with an equitable space to discuss their own personal challenges, engage in discourses on best practices, provide opportunities for one another, and most importantly establish a unified front concerning issues of diversity within the arts.

One can see how social media, the internet, and the digital landscape have all been powerful tools for the public to hold museums responsible for their staffing and collections, as they pertain to issues of diversity and equity. As well as pressuring museums to increase

accessibility and for professionals in the field to build community. Translating this into physical participation is a challenge for museums, however, social media activism has proven that minority visitor groups desire for representation within the museum space and see social media as a comfortable and useful way to promote social justice initiatives. Additionally, museum professionals have utilized the internet to create online communities in which initiatives and goals can be shared, while working together to diversify the field in providing others with job advice and assistance. Social media, the internet, and the digital landscape as a whole, therefore, have proven to be a powerful tool for the public, professionals, and institutions at large to work together toward diversity and better representations of people of color within the art museum space.

Solutions, Resolutions & Conclusions

While issues of diversity both at the leadership and visitorship level within American art museums have been long discussed, studied, and theorized, there has not yet been a clear solution to the problem. Museums have historically struggled to diversify the staffing of their leadership, particularly within the curatorial field. This is patrially due to the socioeconomic barriers preventing

people of color from obtaining the changing educational requirements necessary for leadership roles. Pressure from societal needs for representation within the museum field and current efforts toward diversification in the workplace within society as a whole have recently expedited efforts to provide students of color with fair opportunities to a curatorial career. The Walton Family Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Andrew Mellon Foundation have been influential in promoting fair opportunities through substantial financial contributions to higher education institutions. In consideration of the DEAI initiatives established by the AAM, these foundations are thinking forward toward establishing a diversified professional field, in particular hiring people of color for leadership roles, that reflects the needs of society and reevaluates the art museum as a civic space. In 2015, the Walton Family Foundation and the Ford Foundation awarded the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) a major grant toward their "diversity, equity, and accessibility initiative, which aims to diversify the museum's leadership and generally ensure the museum is an accessible and inclusive place."[62] This grant helped to establish three year-long fellowship positions at the Mia which "targeted toward people of color and indigenous

people,"[63] aimed at strengthening "the pipeline to leadership roles."[64]

In 2018, the Walton Family Foundation awarded Spelman College a 5.4 million-dollar grant toward establishing the Atlanta University Center Collective for the Study of Art History and Curatorial Studies. In conjunction with scholarships awarded at Morehouse College and Clark Atlanta University, "the new initiative will result in the creation of an Art History major and Curatorial Studies minor at the Atlanta University Center."[65] The initiative, aimed to "foster innovation and create an educational pipeline into art museum leadership that is more representative of our nation's increasing diversity,"[66] will allow these historically black colleges to become "[incubators] of African-American museum professionals in the United States."[67] Additionally, in 2013 the Andrew Mellon Foundation created the Mellon Undergraduate Curatorial Fellowship in response to the curatorial field being unreflective of the demographic changes in the United States. This fellowship, aimed at diversifying the curatorial ranks, follows fellows from a one-week summer program for undergraduates at one of six pilot museums located "in areas of the country with ethnically diverse or rapidly diversifying populations,"[68] to a two-year

paid fellowship at a partner institution, and eventual mentorship in the process of earning a PhD. This comprehensive approach to strengthening the curatorial pathway for undergraduates of color in order to foster diversity within the field has proven successful for the Mellon Foundation. According to Mellon.org: "as of early 2018, twenty students have participated in the fellowship, and thirteen alumni have either enrolled in graduate programs or are working in the arts to gain more experience that could place them on a path toward curatorial positions in a museum."[69] Financial contributions from private foundations toward diversification efforts within the curatorial profession are helping to make a career in the arts more equitable for students of color, resulting in increased ownership over the shared voices within an institution.

While missteps have been taken in hiring decisions at the Brooklyn Museum, small but powerful leaps forward can be seen across other departments. The influence of people of color working within curatorial departments is evident through their exhibition, "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power," which showcases a "broad spectrum of Black artistic practice from 1963 to 1983, one of the most politically, socially, and aesthetically revolutionary

periods in American history."[70] Even more remarkable than the exhibition's content itself, which focuses on "the unjust social conditions facing Black Americans, such as Faith Ringgold's painting featuring a "bleeding" flag and Emory Douglas's graphic images of beleaguered Black city life,"[71] is the curator behind the exhibition, Ashley James, who is the Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the institution. James is a young African American woman, and in her first lead exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum showcases over two-hundred works by more than sixty Black artists, demonstrating the importance of hiring curators who are interested in displaying those historically underrepresented voices within the museum space.

What curators choose to put on the walls in their charge shapes cultural narratives. Art, as a reflection of society and the respective historical moment the work was created within, tells viewers what is beautiful, who is powerful, and what stories matter. In choosing the most exemplary works, curators have the authority telling viewers what or who in society qualifies as beautiful and powerful, and the viewer, in their interaction with the piece, decides how they fit in in relation to this. Former president Barack Obama and First-Lady Michelle Obama historically selected

Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherald respectively to paint their portraits for the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, a tradition for every president when exiting their tenure. Not only was the Obama's choice to commission black artists, (both of whom discuss themes of historical modes of power and social justice), significant and groundbreaking, but the actual display of the paintings took on a new life and meaning for the representation of black people within the museum space. Some months after the official reveal of the portraits, an image of an African-American girl standing entranced in front of Michelle Obama's portrait was shared by another museum patron on Facebook. The post went viral and the original photo has now amassed over 27,000 likes, 1,700 comments, and over 36,000 shares across the social media platform. This image of the young girl, later identified as two-year old Parker Curry, staring open-mouthed at the portrait that towers over her, demonstrates the psychological and emotional impact showcasing works depicting people of color in positions of power has on visitors, most importantly young, impressionable visitors. Parker Curry's mother said in an interview with CNN that her daughter believed Michelle Obama was a "queen" and wanted to grow up to be a queen, too.[72]

Representation is powerful and needs to be addressed, considering the 2017 Culture Track Report found that "people of color were 82 percent more likely to cite 'cultural activities as not reflecting people of all backgrounds'."[73] In the case of Parker Curry, social media and a viral post sparked national discussions surrounding representation of people of color on museums' walls, the impact it has on social narratives and the ways in which one's experiences viewing art shape their perceptions of the world.

Curators of color are not only beginning to find a voice, but so are visitors. The quick mobilization of voices in reaction to controversial events within the art world, as published on social media, have not only held museums accountable for diversity initiatives, but have also prompted museums to act quickly to best utilize and disseminate these voices to ensure their credibility and relevance as cultural spaces. The rise and necessity of social media presence for museums has birthed new roles within the museum staff specifically targeted at utilizing this phenomenon to its fullest potential. Directors of digital content, social media specialists, and liaisons between the digital landscape and museum alike are being established at lightning speeds within institutions small and large across the United States. JiaJia

Fei, former associate director of digital marketing at the Guggenheim, was appointed in 2015 as the first Director of Digital for the Jewish Museum. With goals to "[empower and collaborate] with every dimension of the museum to harness the enormous potential of digital to reach new audiences,"[74] Fei and her established Instagram following offer the museum a way to reach new, untapped audiences. In an interview with ArtNet News at the close of her first year in this position, Fei revealed that the "digital space opens up unprecedented access to our holdings, but also invites an entirely new and global audience who may never be able to visit us in person,"[75] further emphasizing the ways in which social media can provide a contact point with the museum without the intervention of a physical space, making collections more equitable.

One museum professional working in a social media strategist role is Caitlin Monachino, Digital Media Coordinator at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut. As digital media coordinator, Monachino utilizes social media to promote the mission and further the reach of her institution. In an interview, Monachino states that the goals of social media at the Aldrich "are to regularly engage with the public and consistently promote Larry

Aldrich's mission in supporting contemporary artists," through the use of "a combination of channels to reach as many demographics as possible."[76] In running the social media platforms for the Aldrich, Monachino has made keen observations regarding how social media users themselves are driving the content they wish to see. "I've noticed that social media sometimes takes a life of its own and trends develop unintentionally," Monachino says, "for example, we started to notice that many people were posting images of their shoes on David Adamo's chalk installation in Objects Like Us on Instagram – from that we were able to develop the #WalkOnChalk hashtag."[77] Monachino observes that, "I find that Facebook tends to be more communicative though, this is where people often post questions and offer their feedback and comments. Both platforms–Facebook and Instagram–act as hubs for the public to interact."[78] The result of audience-driven museum content allows the public to gain a sense of inclusion that has otherwise been historically missing. "The social media channels give the museum a presence outside of its walls where we can engage with people and give them a sense of inclusion to the Aldrich community, and the art world as a whole," observes Monachino, "this is important

because many people often feel excluded from that realm. We always want to make the Museum feel as accessible as possible."[79] This inclusion and sense of shared ownership over a museum cannot be achieved in any other context as democrazating as social media. Monachino attributes increased social media audience engagement not only to hashtag "campaigns", as in the David Adamo installation, but also to "behind-the-scenes documentation/footage – which gives the Museum a greater sense of transparency and consequently greater public interest."[80] Monachino asserts that "people like to really know what's going on at the museum and see it in action, not just posts that look like advertisements."[81]

Museums are increasingly reconsidering their relationship with digital media in order to retain and increase visitorship. By incorporating and encouraging social media use within the museum space, institutions are working to challenge traditional expectations of museum-going behavior and rituals that have historically marginalized unfamiliar visitors. In 2011, the MET, upon recognizing "that cellphones are omnipresent in modern society, and fighting them is a losing battle,"[82] stopped discouraging cell phone use. With 52 percent of visitors to cultural organizations

reporting using social media channels onsite during their visit between 2016-2017,[83] it is paramount museums utilize this technology to encourage visitorship and reshape how visitors experience the gallery space. Many museums, in reaction to the proliferation of cell phones within society, have created "apps that allow visitors to seek out additional information,"[84] changing the expectations for how one should or must interact with artworks. These apps not only make information more accessible, but also the museum going experience a more comfortable one. Many museums have incorporated GPS technology into their apps which make wayfinding through galleries easier and, in turn, increase visitor anonymity. Individuals no longer have to identify themselves as museum-going novices by using bulky maps or asking staff for help, assuming there is no language barrier. By encouraging cell phone use and creating informationally and experientially comprehensive apps, unfamiliar museum goers no longer feel the anxieties brought upon by traditional barriers and exclusions of historic museum-going rituals.

Overall, the use of social and digital media by institutions, visitors, and museum professionals has proven to make museum going, as a whole, more democratizing. "One of the great

advantages of social media is the coupling of its very low barrier to entry and its far reach. Hopefully by presenting a feed where people can learn about who we are and what we do, they will not only become interested and want to visit the Museum, but will also feel personally welcomed before they even show up at the door," believes Monachino, "utilizing social media is a diversity initiative in itself, in a way, because it is out there for all to see. It isn't a mailer that is being sent to certain neighborhoods, or a poster that's only visible in certain places; it's everywhere all at once, for everyone."[85] By utilizing the democratizing power of the digital landscape, museums can successfully solve historic issues concerning a lack of diversity that have long been identified, yet have remained largely unsolved.

Additionally, issues concerning diversity within the professional world, in particular the curatorial career, are being solved through a reexamination of the educational track and online community building. While most recently art history higher education has become clouded by curatorial MA programs aimed at networking that are largely inaccessible to students of color, private foundations are working to help give educational opportunities to and create comprehensive fellowship experiences

for students of color in order to diversify the field. Practicing curators are also solving issues of diversity through creating online cohorts in order to discuss and implement initiatives in support of people of color working in the field and building community in a traditionally insular career. Museum professionals like Kimberly Drew and the Museum HUE co-founders who recognize needs within their communities are creating online platforms to serve the needs of the minority community within the arts.

Furthermore, it is clear that social media has become a powerful tool for solving historic issues of diversity within art museums at both the professional and visitorship levels. American art museums must quickly and wholeheartedly adapt to the digital landscape in order to maintain relevancy and best serve their communities. Visual art is powerful in shaping our shared cultural narrative. Solving historic issues of representation concerning people of color within the arts is not only important for museums to maintain their relevance, but also for equity within society as a whole. Social media, digital media and the internet are democratizing and do not discriminate, making them the perfect entry point for museums to solve historic issues of diversity.

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