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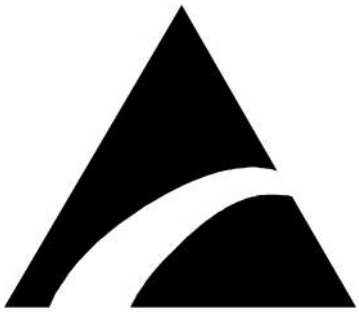
Inside: Evicted Exhibition at the National Building Museum

Plus: Museum Studies Symposium, Mind the Lab, and MORE!

In this Issue:



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Museum Studies Symposium
an Introduction by Robert Mac West

At the end of the spring semester, students graduating from the University of Colorado Museum and Field Studies program convene a symposium in which each delivers a presentation on their project. Eight students gave presentations on April 23, 2018, with topics ranging from collections facilities to animal behavior to connections with formal education. ILE is pleased to be able to present written versions of three of the presentations. These presentations effectively represent the experience and training that a quality museum studies program provides and also how each student pursues their own interests in ways that prepare them for their desired careers in the museum industry. Please read on to experience the work of Claire Steffen, Emma Noffsinger and Reid Sweetkind. Article titles will be marked in red.

Collaborative Museology: The Role of Collections Managers

By Emma Noffsinger

As an emerging museum professional, I think collaborative museology is the future of museums. In order to decolonize practices, serve communities, and positively contribute to humanity, museums need to be inclusive of originating communities' worldviews and knowledge. This article describes how I understand the role of the collections manager in collaborative anthropology by drawing on the School for Advanced Research's (SAR) "Museum + Community: Guidelines for Collaboration." The museum profession is advancing toward inclusivity. I use a collection of Hopi katsina and Zuni kokko (Native American dolls + wood carvings) housed at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History (CUMNH) to show how collections managers can contribute to this movement by preparing collections for tribal review.

Museums began as colonial institutions, with collecting practices that often exploited indigenous communities. Museum exhibits about those communities were often inaccurate and misleading. Much has changed in recent times, exemplified by the passing of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990), the National Museum of American Indian Act (1989), and development of new museology practices. Today, it is common for museums to integrate indigenous scholarship of decolonizing methodologies and post-colonial theory into museology, shifting the power structures within the museum field towards one that includes indigenous perspectives, values, and knowledge.

There is a growing literature that documents and investigates museum collaboration with originating communities. Works such as Communities and Museums: The Politics of Public Culture describe the collaborative process of connecting originating communities with museum collections (Karp 1992). This connection can take the form of repatriation, cultural care practices, and inclusive practices in accessibility. These projects often center and highlight the perspective of curators, conservators, and community members. Building relationships with communities are complex and can take many forms to produce various beneficial products. "Collaboration is about sharing both authority and decision-making and includes cooperative planning, definition of outcomes and roles, task accountability, transparent budget discussions, and a clear structure for communication" (Enote et al., n.d.). Although consultation or one-time visits are appropriate for many occasions, it is different than collaboration. Collaboration is about building a long term relationship in which both parties are equally invested and share authority.

A GUIDE FOR COLLABORATION

Although the museum field is adopting collaboration as best practice, many museums feel lost on how to achieve

such a relationship. How do institutions create relationships with tribes and other communities? How do they maintain these relationships? What should museums prepare for when collaborating? What kinds of resources are needed? It is difficult for museums to commit to a collaborative initiative when the answers to these questions are unclear. In the fall of 2017, the School for Advanced Research premiered a resource for museums to use when pursuing a collaboration: "Museum + Community: Guidelines for Collaboration."

SAR's "Museum + Community: Guidelines for Collaboration" is a short document that outlines what museums should do and know when working with tribal communities. These guidelines are not meant to be used for repatriation consultations associated with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) (1990). There are many other reasons for Native communities to visit collections beyond repatriation. Essentially, these guidelines provide a step by step process for collaboration that any informal learning institution can adopt. These guidelines also include a list of questions that can help museums and tribes define a relationship and project, and they list expectations museums should anticipate and be aware of when working with tribal communities. For example, museum object handling policies may differ from cultural protocols. According the guidelines, museums should expect to explain why gloves are required. Wearing gloves protects handlers from past pesticide applications and are not meant to limit access (Enote et al., n.d.).

These guidelines compliment the "Community + Museum: Guidelines for Collaboration" which are intended to prepared tribes for visiting museums. Both documents mirror each other and have overlapping information. This difference is in the perspective. While one is written for museum audiences, the other is written for a tribal audience. The guidelines for museums, "Museum + Community," educates museum professionals about cultural protocols that might be different from museum policy as well as tools to address any potential misunderstandings. The guidelines for tribes, "Community + Museums," explains museum policies and why they are in place. Using both guidelines, each audience can understand how to work together, find common ground, and communicate with each other in collaboration.

The School of Advanced Research has also produced a website to showcase these guidelines. This website includes many examples of collaborative projects. One example relates to conservation methods. In a collaborative relationship between the National Museum of American Indian and an Alaska Native Artist, Elaine Kingeekuk, conservation practices were improved to include traditional

Figure 1: The University of Colorado Museum of Natural History has a collection of over 250 katsina and kokko wooden carved figures. This collection dates from the late 1800s to present.

conservation methods. These methods were applied to a Native Alaskan parka from Saint Lawrence Island. Western conservation treatments of these types of parkas involve applying Goldbeater skin with adhesive to repair rips and tears. However, these repairs were not always successful and would become detached, leaving adhesive residue. Through a collaborative relationship, Elaine Kingeekuk provided an alternative technique. Drawing on her cultural knowledge, she repaired tears by adding a patch of gut with sinew. Through this partnership, the parka was successfully conserved and prepared for exhibition (McHugh, n.d). Both of these examples exemplify the ways in which Native American knowledge can inform and improve the preservation and management of collections.

One of the greatest strengths of these guidelines is its length. Both documents are short and concise. Neither are convoluted with academic jargon. The ideas represented are accessible to a variety of different educational backgrounds and are accessible online for free. These aspects make this an approachable resource for any institution or tribe to utilize.

Upon reviewing the SAR guidelines and website, I identified what the role of the collections manager would be in a collaborative project. After critically reading the guidelines, I found that step nine describes the role of collections

managers: "9. Send relevant collections history and context information to the community prior to the visit, such as collections documentation, articles, catalog, accession records, photographs, video, and any pesticide treatment history" (Enote et al., n.d. 5). And, after reviewing case studies on the website, I identified the collection of katsina and kokkos at CUMNH as a collection that would benefit from tribal review. Katsina and kokko are wooden carved figures that reference spiritual beings in the Hopi and Zuni worldviews.

PREPARING COLLECTIONS FOR REVIEW

When I saw the collection of katsina and kokko at CUMNH it was apparent that the collection needed conservation treatment. Paint was flaking, feathers were welting, and accessories were missing. However, the database records indicated that these items may have cultural significance to the Hopi and Zuni. Therefore, CUMNH was cautious in ascribing any treatments without knowing more about the collection from these tribes. This makes this collection a perfect case study to test out the SAR guidelines in order to understand the role of the collection manager in community collaborations.

As I mentioned, step nine of the "Museum + Community: Guidelines for Collaboration" is aimed at collections management. It suggests getting the collection ready for tribes to access the collection and associated documents, and in turn provides transparency on behalf of the museum. Prior to my project little was known about the 250 katsina and kokko at the CUMNH. Most of them date to the early 1900s. The database records at CUMNH had virtually no information about the items in this collection. There were no images or descriptions. Condition and condition notes were absent. Some records did not have accession or donor information. Furthermore, many items within the collection needed conservation work. It became apparent that step 9 of the "Museum + Community: Guidelines for Collaboration" was going to be an essential step in preparing the collections to engage in collaboration.

Figure 2 In order to prepare CUMNH's collection of katsina and kokko, museum documentation was researched and close looking exercises were conducted.

With most of the information required in step nine missing, I had to research museum documentation which included donor files, accession files, object research files, and museum archives. Then I had to inventory and investigate items in the collection to compose descriptions and condition notes for each item. Finally, I digitized the collection following best practices and CUMNH's protocols. This was extremely time consuming but essential in providing access and transparency to Hopi and Zuni tribes.

I also researched the collection so that the CUMNH staff had a better understanding of what the collection is in the context of the originating community. This research also helps CUMNH staff to prepare for any NAGPRA-related discussions that may arise during a tribal visit. To do this I searched the Bureau of American Ethnology and more recent publications related to kastinsa and kokko. I looked at tribal websites and publications that include a Native American perspective or were written by tribal members.

I organized all the information I collected into a "Collections Review Binder." This binder includes short summaries of donors, pesticide use, public accessibility restrictions, and conservation concerns. Object records with a page of images for each item followed summaries. I also included contact information of the museum, curator, collections manager, and myself. The next step is to send Collections Review Binder to the appropriate tribal members. While the tribe may decide that a relationship with CUMNH and a review of this collection is not a priority at the moment, sharing this information will show that the doors of CUMNH are open to tribes and their partnership.

A REFLECTION AND CRITIQUE

"Community + Museums: Guidelines for Collaboration" (Enote et. al, n.d.) is the first broadly applicable and widely distributed resource to describe the process of preparing and pursuing a collaborative relationship between museums and communities. By design this resource is meant to be short and approachable. While I believe this is a strength of the guidelines, it is also a weakness. Like other collaborative museology resources, these guidelines overlook the work of collection managers. Preparing collections for review is one of the most important steps in pursuing a collaborative relationship and requires a significant amount of the collections manager's time and resources.

I do not believe this oversight to be intentional, but I do believe it is a gap in the literature.

Before pursuing this project, I was not cognizant of this gap. I pursued this project with the intention of understanding the outcome of a collections review and didn't think about the process prior to the visit. I imagined the role of the collections manger as an integrator, one who facilitates the negotiation of cultural protocols with professional collections management best practices. While this may be one role, it is not the only role of the collections manager in collaborative projects. After completing this project, I would argue that the role of the collections manager starts before the originating communities are even contacted.

A collection manager's involvement in collaboration begins by gaining intellectual and physical control of a collection, and by making collections accessible. With this access, curators can create summaries that can be used in initial contact with tribes and records can be shared once contact is made. As described, to gain control of a collection for review with originating communities, collection managers must conduct an expanded inventory that includes a complete survey of museum documentation, digitization of the collection, and close looking investigation. These activities will produce data that should be formatted and added to a collection management system. Reports are then designed and shared with originating communities. This process of gaining greater intellectual control over collections is not only good for collaboration, but for the museum as well. What starts as preparation for collaboration ends with overall increased intellectual control and therefore improved care of collection.

CONCLUSIONS

New museum practices are shifting the power paradigms within museums by including Native American worldviews in the interpretation and care of collections. As Ivan Karp says in Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture, "The new relationship is not simply one in which museums make assertions and members of the audience challenge them. Claims to authority are countered by parallel claims made by different museum constituencies" (1992, 11). This can happen in exhibitions, programs, and behind the scenes in collections visits. Practical resources like the School for Advanced Research's "Museum + Community: Guidelines for Collaboration" are approachable and adoptable, making collaboration possible for informal learning institutions.

Additionally, I have created a document with guidelines for collections managers that are independent from, but complimentary to, the "Museum + Community: Guidelines for Collaboration." These guidelines for collections managers are available to any institution or individual that requests them. They include a step by step process of how to prepare collections for review, a list of possible resources that can be used, and guiding questions that collections managers should consider. They also highlight some of the beneficial byproducts that result from preparing collections for review. For example, little was known about the kastina and kokko collection at CUMNH not because the museum did not have information, but because the information was stored all over the museum and not centrally in the database. By preparing that collection for review, all information is now stored in one place and can be accessed much more efficiently by museum staff, researchers, and Native community members.

Emerging professionals like myself grew up in the post-colonial era. Many of us were born after the passing of legislation like NAGPRA (1990) and the NMAIA (1989). Looking forward, I predict that collaborative museology will become increasingly mainstream. I predict that as the millennial generation enters leadership roles within museums, we will continue to decolonize the museum and rethink museum practices to shift the colonial paradigms and improve representations in order to serve our community.

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On the cover:

The National Building Museum located in Washington D.C. displays a simple and stunningly impactful installation which brings the experience of being evicted to life.

Full story on page 16.