



REIMAGINING  
THE MUSEUM  
MEDELLÍN 2017

# From Philosophy to Action:

Clues to Reimagining the  
Social Role of Museums in  
the Americas

**Reimagining the Museum:  
Conference of the Americas**  
1-3 November 2017

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American  
Alliance of  
Museums

Museums have the capacity for reformulating social, cultural and environmental values and posing possible solutions to social dilemmas. At **Reimagining the Museum 2017**, the construction of a collective and individual commitment to become agents of civic and social change was fueled by the encouragement to create professional networks. We operated under the belief that when a group of people meets to share both passion and ideas, courage is multiplied and creates a domino effect. Reimagining the Museum offered an opportunity for committed professionals to connect and support one another.

The event was made possible through the collaborative efforts of the **Fundacion TyPA (Teoría y Práctica de las Artes)** from Argentina, and the **AAM (American Alliance of Museums)**, from the United States and, its organizing partner, **Parque Explora** from Colombia. The conference took place from November 1 to 3, 2017, in Medellín, Colombia. This publication summarizes the discussions that took place during the three-day event.





# EL MUSEO REIMAGINADO MEDELLÍN 2017

American Alliance of Museums TRANSICIÓN COPACOL





From November 1 to 3, 2017, the city of Medellín, Colombia, hosted the second edition of **Reimagining the Museum: Conference of the Americas**, a meeting of museum professionals from the Americas organized by the **American Alliance of Museums (United States)**, **Fundación TyPA - Teoría y Práctica de las Artes (Argentina)** and **Parque Explora (Colombia)**.

The conference was attended by 675 professionals representing over 300 institutions from 21 different countries, who came together to discuss the role of museums as agents of social transformation.

Parque Explora, a science and technology museum in Medellín, was chosen as host because it is a symbol of the transformative power of public education and empowerment in a city that has overcome violence and social conflict. It proved to be the ideal host-partner, both because of its unique setting and infrastructure and because of the intelligence, vision and passion of its team.

Throughout the program, the city of Medellín was the setting for the conference, but more importantly, it served as a vivid example of what culture and museums can achieve when striving for true social transformation where the interests of the community, government, and the private sector converge in a clear and shared vision.

**With its belief in the human spirit and its focus on both collective and individual action, Reimagining the Museum provided a forum for encouraging the creation of networks among professionals committed to becoming agents of social and civic change.** The conference openly championed social justice and equity, and provided an unprecedented opportunity to bravely shape new futures for the cultural institutions in the Americas. It also provided a unique opportunity to share challenges and examples of innovation and intercultural collaboration, and to learn strategies to effect change.

Its thoroughness, coupled with its willingness to engage in critical self-examination and an open exchange of ideas through a variety of formats and experiences, ensured the success of the second edition of **Reimagining the Museum** as the region's most important and radical museum gathering.



## In numbers

675

participating professionals

21

countries

300

institutions

89

speakers

157

scholarships

36

sessions  
and over

12

formats: keynotes,  
conversations, roundtable  
dialogues, tours and group  
discussions with teams,  
project contests and more

11

intensive practical workshops

24

luncheon roundtable  
discussions

Cultural activities, special  
experiential visits to local  
museums to exchange  
information with museum staff,  
and tours organized to get a  
better understanding of the city  
and its context.

## Participants

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### COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

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Canada

United States

Panama

Honduras

Costa Rica

Cuba

Venezuela

Ecuador

Peru

Colombia

Brazil

Chile

Uruguay

Bolivia

Argentina

United Kingdom

France

Switzerland

Senegal

South Africa

Russia.

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### ROLES

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Museum directors, historians,  
registrars, educators, curators,  
cultural managers, finance officers,  
administrators, chief operating  
officers, marketing, communication  
and design staff, researchers and  
scholars, among others.

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## What they said about Reimagining the Museum

**94% of the participants that provided  
feedback on the conference indicated  
the conference met or exceeded  
expectations.**

“

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*The greatest thing about Reimagining  
the Museum is that you get to articulate  
multiple viewpoints and understand that  
what we do makes sense and transcends  
the present.*

*This gathering reinforces the notion of  
museum as a space for dialogue. The  
museum as a space of legitimation that  
challenges every allegedly absolute truth.*

*It is truly inspiring to reunite and get to  
know an ever-growing community of  
passionate and inspiring professionals.*

*It is the most human museum conference.  
And that is really necessary.*

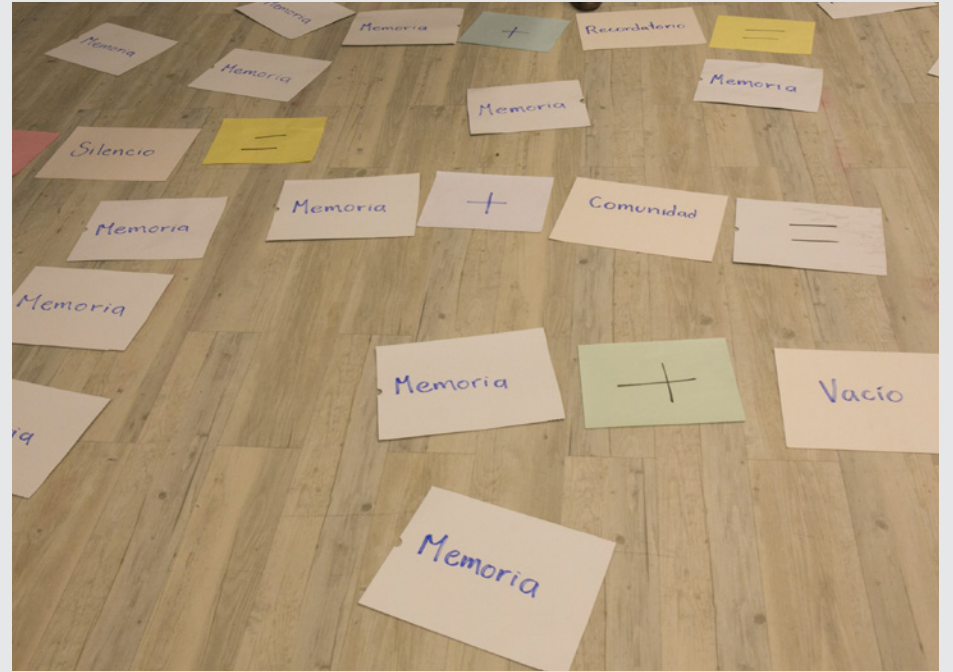
*I think it was the opportunity to picture  
ourselves as people who act inside  
cultural spaces.*













*I sense two great forces that bring us here today. On the one hand there is hope, which, as said by Yves Bonnefoy, seems to believe it possible for experience to be shared and for life to have meaning. On the other, wisdom, which dismantles unfulfilled illusions where hope may get entangled. So I welcome all of you to share that hope and wisdom.*

**Américo Castilla, Keynote Speech, Reimagining the Museum 2017**



The second edition of **Reimagining the Museum** found the core of its discourse in the conversations held there, in and out of the formal sessions. We identified a common concern over social inequality, and, above all, how that inequality finds its way into museums through language and actions.

The reflections and thoughts of the speakers presented below are surprisingly consistent in terms of the agility of their thinking, the determination to translate ideas into action and the willingness to face complex challenges as an essential part of the mission of a museum.

All of the sessions were taped and subtitled and are available at [www.typana.org.ar](http://www.typana.org.ar) or on the TyPA YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/user/FundacionTyPA](https://www.youtube.com/user/FundacionTyPA) for consultation. The text below presents excerpts from presentations made at the conference along with commentary; these have been organized by themes.

The varied and engaging formats, ranging from keynotes to workshops to panel discussions, turned the gathering into a dynamic, creative, and, at times, highly emotional forum. Participants were as passionate as speakers in debating issues to forge a common understanding on museum practices. This experience encouraged divergent viewpoints, which helped to inform a shared vision for the future of museums among attendees.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Américo Castilla'.

**Américo Castilla**  
Fundación TyPA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura L. Lott'.

**Laura L. Lott**  
American Alliance of Museums

# The Museum as Socio-Political Actor

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## I Introduction

—> Ever since museums were first established in Latin America in the late 18th/early 19th century, they have claimed for themselves the right to provide authorized information on current events, portraying their sources of information as signs of stability and security. They thus became an emblem of certainty, and their prestige was built upon this foundation. Although social conflicts challenged those values, museums consistently chose to remain neutral to political and social developments, and most of them constructed their artistic, historic and scientific identities with no need to seek support or endorsement in their surrounding social contexts. Choosing to remain “neutral” however is also a choice; it is often evidence of a position adopted, a decision that seems to have impoverished museums’ discursive potential. But we know that, in fact, the interplay of objects in a collection and its interpretations is never neutral, but bears witness to histories that have conflicting community viewpoints and different meanings based on how they are communicated and by whom.

Although there are many museum professionals who are concerned about what goes on beyond the museum’s walls, new developments hardly ever make it into the exhibit rooms. The argument still prevails that museums should avoid offending anyone or taking sides, at the risk of turning political. Moreover, there is widespread fear that taking risks may result in the loss of institutional or financial support. We believe, however, that there is currently an unprecedented opportunity for self-examination and a thoughtful reimagining of the purposes, practices, rhetoric, and actions of museums, in order to move from authority to participation.

As shown in this report, as long as museums do not adopt a new attitude, the authority they gained in the past will result in the continued representation of certain established political ideas, which the museum will appear to endorse, at least implicitly. The prevailing narrative promotes a certain discourse over others, in complicity with a conservative and often intransigent set of ideas that may render institutions which support them obsolete.

This chapter reflects upon the language often used to define certain

values concerning contemporary society, as well as the relationships resulting from such language, which we assume to be consistent with the rigorous information sources on which museums' credibility was based in the past. The recognition of the social effects fostered by a certain narrative may help facilitate acceptance of the responsibilities and duties attached to it. We expect it may become a first step to shedding light on the values promoted by a museum and lead to more relevant social dialogue.

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## II From Neutrality to Implication: The Museum as Socio-Political Actor

**Rob Stein**

American Alliance Of Museums,  
US

Recently the topic of museums and their perceived neutrality or lack thereof has received a lot of attention. In the midst of the debate many have correctly pointed out that when faced with issues that demand a response, a lack of response is still a choice. To remain neutral is a choice. There is a great T-shirt recently created by Mike Murawski and LaTanya Autry that says "Museums are not neutral." On the flip side are those who rightly seek to enhance and preserve the trusted status of museums with the public as a reliable source of information. Personally, I believe that those two objectives are not mutually exclusive, and that the road to balance between them is often wider than we may think it is.

In 1999, almost 20 years ago, Americans for the Arts released a report called "Animating Democracy" which talked about the capacity for art to become an active platform for civic dialogue. Reading that report again 20 years later, much of it feels very familiar to our circumstances today. They said that, and I quote: "Yet there is a growing concern that opportunities for civic dialogue have diminished in recent years.

Polarization of opinion along ideological, racial, gender, and class lines; exclusive social structures that separate rich from poor and majorities from minorities; a sense of individual disempowerment; and the overwhelming nature of many of society's problems are all factors contributing to this sense. Perhaps most fundamentally, the cross-cutting nature of today's complex issues often places them outside of traditional structures and settings, such as civic organizations, labor unions, and political parties, which have served in the past to organize civic discourse." I think that there is a huge opportunity for museums to step more fully into this role as a platform for dialogue and debate, and it's never been stronger than right now. Our ability to do so does not preclude us from, also and at the same time, taking strong stances on the importance of our communities and our mission. Clearly any issues that jeopardize the museum's position in its community as an advocate for inclusive discourse should demand a response. This would include, in my opinion, any form of racism, oppression or other exclusionary practices that make members of our broadest publics feel unwelcome. First, to do so, we must address the hard truths that there exist today, language, practices and circumstances in our museums that do cause communities to feel excluded both in fact and in practice.

Furthermore, I think that museums have an opportunity to engage proactively in historical events as they unfold, not only in the past tense. Many museums are already pursuing this, and many are taking opportunities to engage their communities in discussing how to document, process and heal during traumatic events. In the United States, this has happened specifically in response to the Pulse night club shooting in Orlando, Florida. This summer there were riots in Charlottesville, Virginia, against white nationalists who were protesting the removal of confederate military statutes, and also over the summer the National Museum of African American History and Culture had a circumstance where a hangman's noose was left in the galleries and in other places in and around the National Mall.

More and more often the public and the press are recognizing the part that museums can play in the contextualizing of these events. Philip Kennicott -art and architecture critic for the Washington Post- wrote about this issue where the hangman's noose was left in the galleries. Kennicott debates whether the Smithsonian might consider accessioning this object into the collection, and what impacts that may hold. He says: "One has to acknowledge the historical power of the object, a reference to lynching, and, by extension, the use of racial terror to

dehumanize and control African Americans, while also affirming the larger and redemptive power of the institution it was intended to vandalize. In a sense, it requires ordinary people to think like museum curators, to search out the meaning in history of an object while placing it in its proper context. The power of museums to do this, to neutralize without minimizing or denying a legacy of pain, is beyond extraordinary. Especially in today's new economy of visual inundation and social media environments that reward both the giving and taking of offense, a thoughtful museum that confronts history honestly is like the control rod inserted into a nuclear chain reaction, absorbing and nullifying ramping energies. In closing, I do not think that museums play the same role as media outlets do, but I think that we can engage with current events that connect to our communities in a discussion that is based on our shared history and cultures. Furthermore, I think that museums could take a stand on their own with respect to issues without shutting down respect for dialogue, and perhaps that could be a model for society as a whole. **FIND OUT MORE IN: THE MUSEUM AS SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTOR**

—> If museums are not islands, but organizations that need to evolve in response to the changing world around them, their alleged objectivity and their reluctance to recognize the socio-political impact of their discourse may undermine their potential to contribute to promoting social equity. A museum that sees itself as an agent of social change, one that aspires to a more democratic, reflective, creative and inclusive society, subscribes to the idea that the research and exhibition of its collections is not to its own benefit, but in the pursuit of broader social purposes and goals.

**Marcelo Araujo**  
Instituto Brasileiro de Museus, Brazil

Museums must be institutions that engage with society and their contemporary world, but without losing sight of their specialties and roles. Thus, they need to identify which relevant and efficient strategies may be developed without falling into the temptation of ineffective and risky activism, or becoming isolated or distant, which is just as negative. Museums have numerous tools, such as exhibits, debates, publications, online media and others. We must carefully analyze which ones are the best fit in each case, as well as seek to connect with other social agents to confront controversial or socially sensitive matters. This past month, several Brazilian museums and cultural centers fell victim to attacks by society's most conservative sectors, particularly by religious fundamentalists, characterized

by strong intolerance. It is precisely to fight back against such attacks that museums must conceive of themselves as spaces for the promotion of its citizenry and the construction of a culture of peace.

In my view, one of the greatest mistakes a museum can make is to present itself as a complete construction, thus denying or hiding its own history. It is essential that museums present themselves and their work from a perspective of process, seeking to identify the voices responsible for their historical narrative, as well as any voices absent from that narrative, to create a dialogue between the two which visitors may understand and build upon. Museums are spaces for study, research, education, contemplation, leisure, dialogue and also for the construction of museological narratives. These narratives are built both with silences and sounds, as with music, which presents itself as an orderly sequence of audible notes and short silent pauses. Just as a musical piece would sound horribly if it featured every possible sound, a narrative containing all the stories in the world would be unintelligible. Narratives, stories and museological discourse are social constructs. Nothing in the past is invented, but instead passes through the interpretative filter of the narrator, whether we are talking about a book, a newspaper, an exhibit or an institution. How can we then think of a story told by a museum? Narratives are produced based on choices, power struggles and silences. Thus, the museum, conceived as a socio-cultural legitimizing and valorization space, selects and discriminates at the same time, produces voices and silences and determines what will be shown to its visitors. However, when it opens up a dialogue with those social groups generally absent from traditional museological narrative, institutions begin to rethink what had previously been perceived as absolute truth. **FIND OUT MORE IN: THE MUSEUM AS SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTOR**

—> How can museums spark dialogue and engage in current debates drawing upon what is unique and special about them? These institutions have the poetical and symbolic capital of their collections, i.e., the sum of objects that have grown to acquire a meaning different than the functional purpose for which they were originally conceived. Museum objects add their uniqueness to their aesthetics, their potential for interaction and, perhaps most importantly, their capability of being a protagonist in human, individual and social stories. The value of our collections relies on a spatial, social and poetic context that allows them to move in time as long as they become the thread of a cohesive narrative. They are not anchored to a specific historical

moment, but are instead participants with their rich symbolic quality in the formulation of questions about the present.

**David Anderson**  
National Museum Wales, UK

One of the greatest values of museums is their symbolic significance, which is very often out of scale to the budgets they get, or the size of the buildings and organizations. Sometimes we find that's to our benefit, and sometimes we find that's to our cost, as well, but I think it's an asset; it's one we see time and again and perhaps we are not using it as fully as we could. The United Kingdom is sometimes portrayed as a nation which has failed to come to terms with its imperial past. I should perhaps give a couple of examples where that's not true. One of them is in Liverpool where the International Slavery Museum is located. I think it broke incredible new ground by creating a major new center for debate around this particular element of Empire in Great Britain. I also want to mention that just in the last week or two, the Birmingham Museum has opened an exhibit called "The Past is Now: Birmingham and the British Empire" in which they say "While the Empire has officially ended, its legacy still exists today in institutional structures, and affects both individual and national senses of identity." This exhibit has great significance for Great Britain: something like this may be taken for granted in other countries, but is a giant step for Great Britain.

Are museums just a community gathering place, or are they, more fundamentally, a way of thinking? I feel that as the diversity of our work expands, the different ways we operate become more varied and richer because of that, and the locations where we operate become more varied and richer too. Maybe the time has come to take a step back and ask ourselves: Are there distinctive ways of thinking, feeling and acting that we could describe as characteristic and distinctive of museums? Or are these things that are not, in fact, exclusive or particular to us but may be found in many different places in society? And I think that question of locus, which can be valuable and symbolic, and at the same time this question of ways of thinking and possibly the tension between the two, is an area that we need to explore more as we search for new roles for museums.

**FIND OUT MORE IN: THE MUSEUM AS SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTOR**

### III From Representation to Conciliation: How to Work with the Difference

—> Ever since their inception, museums, especially national museums, have attempted to write a country's official history. Just like other types of institutions of authority, the histories that these museums constructed primarily represented the dominant social group, often leaving out a large majority of the population. In contexts of growing inequality, to what extent does the museum contribute to creating discrimination; conversely, how can the museum help change the conditions that promote it?

Historically, these institutions have acted as spaces that have reflected and replicated perspectives that not only define and support the values, beliefs and ideology of the founding dominant group, but also perpetuate that group's view of underrepresented groups. These practices deprive these groups of any chance of representing themselves and, as such, bars them from accessing the museum, as visitors or at any level in our organizational charts.

**Marilia Bonas**  
Memorial da Resistência, Brazil

Museums' role on this topic is built upon two challenging, different and complementary aspects. On one hand, we must engage these populations in the actions carried out by the museum as subjects rather than objects, acknowledging and showcasing their presence and contribution to exhibits. On the other hand, we must think strategically of actions and projects that enhance our understanding of the dynamics of migration and the challenges in the cities of destination, at the most diverse levels. We are not talking about migrants as an object of our research; we are not scholars explaining the experience of "the other self." We must place them at the center of our discussion and open up a space for them to share their experiences. We are accustomed to talking of others as if they were objects rather than subjects, for the opposite would imply sharing, opening up a space, losing control. It is dangerous; yet, it is the right thing to do.

One of the main challenges facing museums dealing with the issue of immigration and human rights more generally is not to talk only to our peers, to preach to the choir, although we rely on them and their capacity to expand our horizons. Conversely, we may think of collaborative curatorships, engagement strategies that will allow communities to choose what represents them best in the museum, exhibits with areas of direct public participation where they may write their views, share their stories, access what others have said and say what they would do themselves in that context, asking them, for example, “If you were to curate the exhibit, if you were to evaluate our exhibit, what would you do to improve it?” Cultural activities may be planned, carried out, and managed by the community. Ultimately, it is all about sharing the space, handing over power, guaranteeing a multiplicity of voices and groups [...]

Enhancing museums’ listening skills is equivalent to enhancing actual dialogue; the purpose of such dialogue is not to convince ourselves that we are doing things right, and it is not a dialogue associated with some messianic sentiment like: “I’m going to save this neighborhood, I am going to engage this community and make a big difference.” For we know that social impact is relative. And, of course, we need to deal with that, with the fact that people have more pressing problems than discovering their identity in a museum.

What is the smallest, the slightest difference museums can and should make in this context? It does not need to be a big project. Sometimes it is something small, sometimes it is just offering access to a bathroom, or water, or shelter from the rain. I think we can reduce our expectations, listen more and turn this into one of our main strategies. We have the power of information to fight fear -because fear is the force that is behind this conservative wave throughout the world- and we have empathy to fight hatred. When we talk about polyphony we are talking about the harmony in differences. Thus, I think it is important to discuss the limits of tolerance in museums. The global conservative and xenophobic wave feeds on the fear of the “other,” the fear of what is different, the loss of privileges, the threat against individual or group identity.

In Brazil, we are now coping with these terrible conservative waves... some groups have even begun attacking museums, especially complaining against nudity and eroticism in art. They have never been to a museum and do not open the doors to dialogue. How to deal

with that? How should museums deal with the aggression of those who fear art, memory, history and freedom? This is new to us, but we know that the limit of tolerance is to be intolerant to intolerance and to those that violate humanity and life. We need to turn intolerance into an issue, but without promoting it. We need to discuss it because it is an essential issue, but yet resist it. We must never confuse intolerance with freedom of speech, for they are truly different things. And we need to contextualize hatred, without embracing it as a legitimate voice. When we talk about polyphony, it is worth remembering this. We are social institutions, we never embrace hatred, we never embrace anything against humanity, against diversity, against differences. I believe this is the true resistance, and we need to keep it focused, for the world is ever more complex. And I am sorry, but museums are not neutral; we have this role, and if you are a museum worker and do not feel comfortable, and would love to be neutral, I think you should find a different job. Because as brilliantly put by Brigitte Baptiste, science is not neutral either. When we talk about social sciences, about memory, nothing is neutral. I think that is the way: to fight fear with information; to fight hatred with resistance. **FIND OUT MORE IN: [EMBRACING DISSONANCE IN THE MUSEUM](#)**

—> Giving a voice to those who have traditionally been underrepresented is a powerful tool to better represent the different communities of the museum. However, we need to pay attention to how this discourse is generated, for it often holds on to opposition scripts of oppressed versus oppressors. This results in a vicious circle where the actors mutually exclude each other, and where the museum is at risk of replacing one voice with another, perpetuating the tensions that arise from this Manichaeism of “us against them.” How can these voices co-exist beyond conflict? What are the conditions under which they might be able to tell their stories to each other? How can museums give tools to the traditionally underrepresented to tell their own story, without perpetuating certain negative power dynamics? It is hard to respond to these questions, because the well-known maxim of “Not doing for others, but with others” is not easily applied. Those who have traditionally been underrepresented also need tools, they also need the support of the museum to create new discourses that will allow them to transcend domination. How can museums contribute not only to provide visibility to the invisible, but to create counter-hegemonic stories? If we think of hegemony as domination and maintenance of power exercised by one person or group over another, imposing upon them their own values, that hegemony not



only seeks to maintain the power of one group over another, but also to impose a discourse-shaping order. The possibility of museums promoting a counter-hegemonic discourse not only provides visibility to those who are invisible in order to build a discourse from a different perspective, but also may help dismantle the prevailing order that discriminates against difference and promotes exclusion.

**Lucía González**

Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, Colombia

Miravalle is a farmers' reserve area in Caquetá, an area historically controlled by the FARC [Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia]. It is one of the famous "Republiquetas," the name given to the areas where farmers were moved to. This happened after the bombings to annihilate a group of 20 guerrilla-fighters that were operating in the country, which led to a 50-year war. A lot has been written about this territory, but none of it by the community itself. They were targeted by government bombings until the year before last because they are all guerrillas in the eyes of the authorities. As if they could be wiped out with bombs. The inhabitants of the region have waged wonderful historical battles to remain in that land, to defend their dignity. They do not see themselves as victims; rather, they feel they have resisted as a community, a community of farmers, of beautiful settlers, who have coexisted with the FARC. They came with the FARC and they managed to create some sort of an order with them through constant bargaining. The FARC always felt they could dominate the territory, but the settlers instituted this order where they could negotiate. And now, the settlers are concerned about how they will live without the FARC because, ultimately, the FARC was an authority that protected them from mining, from the militia, from deforestation and many other things. Thus, unlike the rest of the country, the inhabitants of Miravalle are concerned about the FARC's demobilization. Next week, they will hold "El Retorno," a celebration of home-coming, of "returning." Why did they have to leave at one time, some 400 people, with their children and all of their belongings? Because they could no longer withstand the bombings. So, they left, but then they returned, and that is what they celebrate, year after year. We are trying to build a story that truly comes from them, instead of imposing it on them. You need to step into their shoes. It is not easy. We all know the theory: doing not for them but with them, but it is not at all easy. Ultimately, they need the tools, they need our support. What challenges do they face when it comes to telling the story themselves? We have been making some urban plans that

include schools, one of which was built by the FARC. Members of the community painted a portrait of Manuel Marulanda, the father of the FARC, on an outside wall of this school. Marulanda is not hated there as he is elsewhere in the country; instead he is seen as someone who played a leading role in their history. To what extent does the wolf in the story play a key role? They want to build a museum. I think that they imagine a museum as a house with portraits on the walls, for they also have this hegemonic discourse in their head. They cannot imagine a museum their own way. Why not? That is, a museum is also an image imposed from outside. The settlers that came to this area have a culture, a language, an infinite distance to the nation, because the State was never there - actually, only the army ever was. How should we write this story in which the army also played a leading role, and how are we going to describe that leading role? How to include all of those men, who were not only part of the FARC, but also children of that land, in a story that not only tells the horrors of the war, but everything they did for that land? How to build that story so that the country can hear it and understand that this community, which was always prejudged and excluded for being part of the guerilla group, cannot possibly reject that reality, which is so innate to this territory? The story must be told before historians get here, as William Ospina says in *Colombia en el planeta*; in other words, we need to have the people tell the story themselves, and not by someone else from outside their community. **FIND OUT MORE IN: THE EXPANSIVE MUSEUM**

—> As long as museums manage to avoid this oversimplified opposition between the powerful and those they dominate, then we may intellectually explore other social relationships that may pave the ground for reconciliation, or at least a less reductionist, better informed, and less prejudiced understanding of the power dynamics at play. How does an institution create the space and language to make that happen? The museums in Colombia, and in Medellín more specifically, have been seeking answers to these questions for years, for they place culture at the core of the community's debate rather than protect the barriers set up by violence, injustice, and inequity.

**Martha Nubia Bello**

Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia

I would like to pose five challenges. The first challenge for the museum [Museo de Memoria de Colombia], where we can really show how brave we are, is to challenge power. In this context, challenging power means not yielding to those pressures we face daily,

usually in the form of utterances such as: “What are you planning to say about us?”, “What are you going to say about the others?” or “They did worse things than we did.” We are always caught in that debate, especially now as the country is negotiating a peace process, in which memory is playing a key role. I believe our true challenge here is how we can de-mythologize our so-called heroes, to counter their mythical aura, and to show the greatness of those who were oppressed and are remembered in history as the defeated. Museums can do this in many ways, using many different forms of expression, to portray, for example, the traditional hero in a different light or to highlight the role of female heroes who have long been unsung throughout our conflict, clearly without demonizing the one or canonizing the other. It is a battle against stereotypes, against stigmatization, against the epic discourse that keeps on legitimizing and legalizing violence.

Second, we must challenge impunity, which also entails challenging power. This requires some very specific actions from a museum. I am talking about that impunity that is consummated through silence, oblivion, misrepresentation or denial. I would suggest several possible scenarios for a museum, in terms of how to challenge impunity, by making visible what they attempted to make disappear. Not only people were disappeared; ideals and projects were exterminated too. In Colombia, there was a genocide committed against a political group, the Unión Patriótica. The museum’s mission would not be limited to referring to the victims of Unión Patriótica, but to rescue that political project, which they tried to destroy, to give a voice to those they sought to silence, which requires very active participation by the victims. Challenging impunity means to challenge the terms “victory” and what we call “defeat”; military operations -even the most current ones- keep being named Victory Plan. Somebody’s victory is someone else’s defeat. We must put back together what has been broken. The museum has an opportunity, through its programming, to unite, to connect, what the war has destroyed because the war has built a wall of mistrust between us, creating isolation among us. A museum does justice if it helps to overcome the isolation, the divisions, symbolically. That is the challenge facing the museum: how to symbolically defeat the culprits, the perpetrators, how to prevent the fulfillment of their criminal purpose. If the perpetrator sought to have anything or anyone disappear, the museum makes it reappear, and that is the challenge for the museum in my view.

Third, we must challenge despair, the twin sister of helplessness and passivity. What do we do to prevent museums from becoming museums of horror? Telling everyday stories rather than epic stories might be one way. Telling stories that convey everyday bravery, greatness and that have the potential to change the course of things. I’ll share a small example from a neighboring community called San Carlos. How do we tell the country and the world that a teacher ate a list that the militia had put together with the names of the persons to be murdered? And by eating that list, as she says -“I ate it, I swallowed it”-, she changed destiny, she changed the fate of the people whose names were on that list. These are small but powerful stories, and they underscore the value of actions like this, they reveal the vulnerability of the powerful, their ethical deficiencies. Power is not absolute; power may also be challenged by highlighting such actions and the changes effected by them. This country is full of stories of individual bravery, but also of the triumph of organized communities that managed to fend off armed groups; of communities of determined women, for example, that recovered their children who had been forcibly recruited by militias. These stories must also be told, for they are the ones that allow society to feel that history is not fixed, but something that may be transformed. Underscoring the value of the small and the insignificant is perhaps the best way to feel connected. The large mega-stories in which our war is characterized as historical, structural and complex impose those three terms on us like a collapsing concrete building that prevents us from taking action. I am not saying that the war is not historic, structural and complex, but if we do not focus on the small, everyday stories, our capacity for action is hindered. We need to take control of the script in order to keep it from becoming a story of horror and fear, and turn it into a narrative about transformation and the possibility of change.

Fourth, we need to challenge our visitors, make them uncomfortable, make sure they don’t have too good a time at our museums, poke them, tell them stories they do not want to listen to instead of the ones already known to them. Such a long and degraded conflict as we have endured feeds stereotypes and prejudice, and these are strengthened by mental laziness. Instead of providing easy answers, we need to break the link of causality and duality: good and evil; these were the culprits and these were the victims; always a categorical distinction. Our story is filled with nuances that must also be told, and we must respond to every question with information, but also with further questions.

Finally, we need to ask ourselves how can a museum, particularly a human rights museum, challenge canons of aesthetics and so-called academic rigor. I am reminded of a quote by the artist Beatriz González warning us not to use the museum walls to write a book. Those of us who are scholars are always tempted to write a book on the wall. We are here to validate the experiences and knowledge of the non-academic sector. The victims are the subject matter experts in this conflict; they can best tell their story. Recognizing different knowledge production sources beyond the academic world and valuing experience as a source of wisdom are, in my view, the main challenges facing the museum today. **FIND OUT MORE IN: BRAVE ORGANIZATIONS**

—> How can museums and their work with history and memory avoid widening the existing gaps in a community? How can they work to bring people together? Inasmuch as they manage to guarantee a space of respect, security, freedom of speech and openness to different positions, they may be able to encourage opposing groups to set aside prejudice and engage in fruitful dialogue.

**Elaine Heumann Gurian**  
The Museum Group, US

Reconciliation, complexity, nuances: we can choose words and forms of expression that are less focused on pointing fingers, that favor instead a conciliatory approach. We are in a world increasingly polarized, less open, less porous. It is imperative for museums to move towards understanding that they can be agents of reconciliation amidst dangerous political climates. We ought not to be accomplices of the failure to change and the lack of action. In these contexts, museums may foster dialogue and provide a platform for individual narratives founded on shared experiences. They can be the ones that invite “enemies” to engage in dialogue and acknowledge the pressures they are under, their humanity and the partiality of their claims. Giving voice to authentic witnesses, to those that have been affected by tragedy, and giving them a way to engage in affective discourse, which speaks and recognizes emotions as a form of accessing the honesty and credibility of all parties, can help pave the way towards a reconciliation process. We must embrace the risks associated with working towards reconciliation. **FIND OUT MORE IN: WHAT’S ELAINE HEUMANN GURIAN THINKING ABOUT NOW?**

—> There is a reluctance to listen to the voices of those we feel we are in conflict with; we often even fear they may weaken our own arguments. However, seemingly incompatible positions may find common ground by discussing how both sides experience violence or how they see each other as subjects. In this regard, the museum is not called upon to solve a conflict, but to encourage resolution and provide a setting where that conflict may surface and be addressed. A setting where, unlike what may happen in the street or at a family meeting, there is no pressure to uphold a certain position; a setting instead where one can work, even in silence, in shaping an opinion and in finding new ways to reflect upon a certain problem, issue, or tension.

**Elizabeth Silkes**  
International Coalition of Sites of  
Conscience, US

I propose a three-tier process that starts with shattering stereotypes, ceding authority and sparking action. The first step to moving through those three processes is recognizing [...] there is not one single truth. We work with the four truths based on the Transitional Justice Framework developed by the Bosnian and South African Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. This allows us to create space for multiple narratives. Forensic truth is the public or official truth of what happened, the official acknowledgement of what happened. Social truth is established through interaction, discussion and debate among all community members. Personal truth is also the individual truth, the individual narratives of victims, perpetrators, witnesses. And, finally, reconciliatory truth is the healing truth, the truth which helps to repair damage and prevents the recurrence of violence. We begin by accepting all of these truths. We open the door to multiple narratives and then we begin to shatter stereotypes. [...] Ultimately, individual narratives bring people together when they engage in a formal dialogue process, a facilitated process where they may come from different backgrounds, different positions, different perspectives, but they still find common ground in those narratives, regardless of where they come from in terms of their personal truth. Finally, these communities decide that they do not want to forget that past but they do not want it revived, and that triggers collective action. **FIND OUT MORE IN: THE FUTURE OF MEMORY**

## IV From Complicated to Complex: How to Narrate at the Museum

—> Museums wishing for more inclusive societies may ask themselves whether there are conditions that create exclusion in their social and political contexts, and even whether that happens at the museum itself. In museums, exclusion may arise from a determination to organize discourse in a certain manner or from the idea that order is necessary to understand a narrative, dismissing any aspect of the story that might make understanding the narrative more complex or more nuanced. More specifically, synthesis is a tool museums often use as a way of threading together the different narratives presented in every gallery. Exhibits seek to synthesize concepts into themes, just like a label seeks to summarize the information about an object in a caption. By presenting ideas in summary form, museums try to provide access into a theory or idea, ideally without losing any of its nuances. Synthesis does not preclude nuance, but it does have the tendency to channel the discourse into a certain interpretative line. It is a comfortable discursive technique for the author, who finds satisfaction in articulating an idea effectively, and also for the intended audience, who finds satisfaction in having an explanation provided. The problem lies in the fact that most social systems -a subject often addressed by museums- are inherently complex, and a complex system is difficult to define because of its inherent instability and unpredictability. Even knowing many of its elements and behaviors, it is impossible to know with certainty how it will behave once it is set into motion. A complex system always produces unexpected outcomes that cause it to mutate and acquire a different shape with each permutation.

Reflecting again upon the peace process in Colombia, even knowing the actors and analyzing past behaviors, it would be naive to attempt to predict the evolution of the country in the near future. This perspective, which poses limits to the scope of any explanation

of a complex and current social issue, is seldom presented as such. Conversely, the fact of introducing nuance, incorporating different viewpoints and different voices, is often mistaken for a representation of the complexity of a subject. Nonetheless, it may provide intellectual legitimization of what is incomplete, what is unknown and perhaps not fully knowable, and make it easier to embark upon less restrictive or proscriptive processes, and with more fulfilling results.

**Elaine Heumann Gurian**  
The Museum Group, US

I have been thinking about linguistic markers and traditions. Linguistic temples if you will.

What are the shorthand ways to talk about the ideas that are swirling around? Much of what you heard this morning on taxonomy as an inadequate method to differentiate objects speaks to the complexity and traditional ways of characterizing the objects of a collection and their contexts. I have also been thinking about decoupling your assumptions about that object and recoupling them into something different. Can we look at the object as raw data? Can we decouple the content that's been manufactured by the museum from the raw data that makes up the object? And then, can we recouple information to that raw data in multiple ways, at multiple levels, so people can use that raw data for things that are more than one thing? Can we, therefore, de-simplify the museum? And that's my big conundrum at the moment because there's a lot of brain research which says that we are physiologically predisposed to simplify, and because we are predisposed to simplify, which we do quite automatically, we like simple answers. Now, if you stop for a second and you think about label writing technique, and you think about label writing schools of thought and ways to explain things, one of the things we've done in the museum world for a very long time is to present information as a coupling of curator and object, as if they were related: "This is the most important Greek vase." Who says that? The vase did not come labeled that way. That information is generated by the people who have done hard-won academic work. But one's associations may be much too simple, the gradations and nuances of the association are left out in most of our museum presentations. There are a lot of people working on something called "Complexity Theory," which is by its nature complex, but by and large what it's about is that large data sets allow us to see that small actions can have small consequences, but also they can have large consequences -it's quite unpredictable. My conundrum is that to complexify the museum we must go against tradition, and that is not what the human soul really wants.

Allow me to make another point regarding complexity. If museums are part of society, what does a current phenomenon such as fake or simplified news, which led in part to Donald Trump being elected president in the United States, mean to them? What does it mean that -however well-intended- museums are producing oversimplified exhibits, narratives with a single through-line, missing all of the other stories, especially those of the people who are usually left out? Something I learned at the last edition of Reimagining the Museum has to do with scale. Governments are constantly asking us to scale up. They ask for impact statements, but what they are truly asking for are for numerical impacts, and what they are looking for are for big numbers. They think what we are doing does not make a difference if you talk about small numbers. But what I've learned is that small is actually the scale that matters. So, what do you do with impact if small is the scale that truly matters? If bravery comes hand in hand with small and if community development is truly tied to small, then I guess the problem is not scaling up, but replication, which I like to call "contagion," because the replication is not done slavishly, but more in the form of cellular mutation. Small has turned contagious, and it has surprisingly become the norm.

I have also been thinking about metaphor. I have just been to the Memory Museum here in Colombia, and it is the most wonderful museum. They deal in metaphor, and that is something that I am really interested in, and not just metaphor as a political action tool. I am interested in erasing the boundaries between spirituality and rational thinking, between metaphor and reality, and between the issues of emotion and those of dispassionate presentation. What we have belongs to everyone. It is not our stuff. Much of what we have was not, in its original context, devoid of emotion, and if objects do have an emotional meaning, isn't that one of the uses of our museums? Shouldn't we be using an emotional meaning as well?

I would love to dive into the civic mesh as a place to model inclusion, I would like us to engage in a dialogue between our enemies and ourselves, which is what we saw yesterday at the Memory Museum, where reconciliation and a lack of finger-pointing and non-simplicity are the cornerstones of the museum.. We need to teach nuances. We need to teach ways in which to find merit somewhere in the arguments of our enemies. We need to be able to see that even our enemies are human, that they have not flown in from Mars. To give you an historic example, we called those people Nazis but, once the war was over,

there were no more Nazis. Then, where did they come from? I was only seven when the war concluded, and I was trying to figure that out. We need to stop doing that and come to understand that people are people. Even when we disagree, we need to find ways of finding merit in them, and find the best way linguistically to build a dialogue between both parties. **FIND OUT MORE IN: WHAT'S ELAINE HEUMANN GURIAN THINKING ABOUT NOW?**

—> History museums, just like art or science museums, speak the language of their own discipline. They all have their own methods and modes of discourse, their own theory and, above all, their own classifications or taxonomies to define the scope of their discipline and its objects of study. "It is not 'scenery,' it is a landscape painting." "It is not a woman with a dove, it is the Annunciation." Knowing these forms can open up these subjects. Seeing a painting as a "still life" rather than a collection of inanimate objects may make one think of other still lives or lead to a comparison of the classical versus the baroque style. It proposes certain lines of possible associations, but also blocks others. Museums work with the order proposed by the discipline or disciplines they identify with: art museums work with artistic periods, genres, and movements; a history museum works with historic periods and events; a museum of natural science works with biological taxonomies. From afar, these taxonomies appear evident, clear. Up close, the order becomes more elusive and the definitions or rules on which they are organized become less distinct, blurred, turning those taxonomies into constructs that require a third party to determine where to draw that dividing line. Perhaps we might develop order built on more open, more fluid taxonomies, independent from a certain pictorial style or historic moment, and adopt different forms of interpreting the present. Just like tailors who use a basting stitch to temporarily hold a piece of sewing in place, so might museums fashion pieces that need not be finished, allowing others to define the limits of the work. The basting may be undone and redone to refashion the narrative.

**Brigitte Baptiste**  
Instituto Humboldt, Colombia

How can we build the identity of objects in culture? You do it all the time. In fact, museums are devices created for that purpose, to represent conflicting identities or to mitigate the dissonance of the ontological conflict among the components of an object [...]. When we inquire about our own participation in this identity world, a big problem emerges. Take a look at one

another for a second and you will see that we have a big problem. We are all very different: in fact, every one of us would deserve a spot in a Cabinet of Curiosities -I imagine we would sometimes like to put certain people in formaldehyde; I would prefer alcohol myself. But more and more often the result is that somewhat hilarious world of gender classifications of human beings. I am often asked in the street, "What are you?" with all due respect, as if they were asking what kind of animal I am... an ant? a Martian? There is a website called "The Identity Project" where visitors are allowed to identify themselves, and walk away with a certain designation, such as "Gender Queer Tender-Hearted Baba." It is almost like picking ice-cream flavors: "Could I please have a scoop of vanilla with raisins, but without the blackberry sauce; with a cookie, but make sure it is a diet one, not chocolatey..." And that is how we build identities, and there is no comfort in that for researchers working on identities.

And it gets more complicated: there are between 80 and 105 Colombian native ethnic groups, every one of them with their own language and their own way of organizing the world. For some, ants are not ants but beetles; for others, there is no difference between birds and monkeys, for they are all animals that jump from tree to tree; for others, reality is not the same as it is for us. And although it is true that you can attempt a partial translation, when it comes to making a serious decision about life, these translations are not flawless. Linguistic barriers persist. By way of another example, everyone insists on dressing the way they like, and this is yet another evident identity problem, that representation: "This is who we are and how we live, and the others are not us."

So I wonder, how do you create a museum to reflect such eccentricities? And I mean eccentricities in the Gaussian sense, i.e., statistical, peripheral, since only 1.5% of Colombia's population is indigenous or has a knowledge system which is not the Western normative scientific system. Besides the issue of indigenous identities and queer identities, the problem may be seen as something much simpler if we just talk about men and women or how feminine or masculine are shaped in the world, how they are represented and, ultimately, whether the fact of being a man or a woman implies having different knowledge or a different world view. Do women see the same ants? Do men and women build a model of the world in the same way? Of course, all of these questions have answers and they can all spark epistemological discussions, but the questions may not be the right ones, because

"man" and "woman" have been defined beforehand, they imply a preestablished taxonomy. Everyone is supposed to know what a man or a woman is, and there is also biological data as well as specimens or holotypes in some museum for everyone to visit, look, analyze and touch, and design restroom signs based on that. Look at the taxonomy of restroom signs to see if any of them contains anything that would allow you to tell men from women from a biological, "natural" viewpoint.

Of course, ecofeminism has worked to eliminate that natural reductionism that results in a purely political, highly politicized identity construction, built only to perpetuate domination, to convey a certain truth that will prevail over other people's differences. So, what characterizes the political process: building difference or building truth? It all depends on what you decide in terms of how the truth prevails over difference, or how difference prevails, or how difference challenges the truth. And that is what we are basically immersed in in our everyday lives. Museums must have this continual discussion on what to show, with what purpose in mind, how much truth you show and how honestly you show it, so as to be able to define the type of relationships established and the narrative used to tell a story, the one you will use to interact with society, whether it is a museum of natural history or a contemporary art museum.

As a biologist, I stand by the idea that diversity constantly begets diversity, and any turn of evolution, any transformation of a living phenomenon, will always result in greater difference -unless we are talking about extermination, or a process of systematic elimination of differences- and that process is as biological as it is social. What we learn from our natural experience is absolutely cultural. This is not new; the only way we have to make sense of the world is by interpreting the world; i.e., by using our own cognitive tools, so that even a museum of natural history is, above all, a cultural museum. This part of the discussion could be applied to any identity problem. If instead of sex and gender we use species and ecosystems, or we take any set of apparently naturalist or culturalist dichotomies, we are going to have a problem, we are always going to have problems. **FIND OUT MORE IN: QUEER ECOLOGIES**

—> Can we organize the story of the museum based on challenging the taxonomies we use to define reality and the relations between those taxonomies? There are spaces of uncertainty that appear to be irreducible or unexpected within a system apparently closed. The Queer Museum works with identities that are incomplete in nature, and seeks to maintain relationships between the system's components as close as necessary to create understandings, and as loose as necessary to allow movement. It is among

those loose connections where instability emerges, where creativity occurs, where new qualities arise that are not predictable, where the system becomes more complex. Projecting that perspective, the museum might identify (and generate) new patterns and identities that go beyond pre-established margins. These “mutations” which arise from the environment in which they occur, would allow it to change jointly with the context, and more likely ensure its sustainability.

**Brigitte Baptiste**  
Instituto Humboldt, Colombia

What is natural? What claims absolute truth status? What precedes knowledge and what is the outcome of interpretation? The problem is whether it is the scientist that imposes order onto the world, or if the world has been organized from the very beginning. I am no philosopher, but this is actually an everyday discussion and not irrelevant when it comes to building a natural history museum.

I am using the English term “queer,” out of respect for the person who came up with the term; ultimately, we are using an untranslatable word, coined back in 1990 at conferences on gender, which results from the impossibility of imposing a single identity model for the expression of human sexuality and gender. Subsequent research has uncovered that gender and sex issues are equally complicated for all living species, and equally problematic, or even more problematic, because in the world of biology there is everything and more. Accordingly, the idea of “queer” is an interesting one because it conveys that there is something among the certainties, a space where reality becomes blurred, where ontology does not allow for categorization. There is an inherent delimitation of the nature of the world, and that would be inherent in the existence of things; nothing is totally irreducible and some of the problems we are discussing today arise from that desire for reducing the objects under study to a pure condition, to an absolutely clear identity condition, i.e., an excess of light shed on the object under study. If we shine a bright spotlight on what we would like to know, sooner or later we will become unable to see the subtlety of the shadows that shape its movement through time. That is queer theory, i.e., there is a knowledge space you can only get to by looking at it through the corner of your eye.

To build a museum, it is essential to know how it defines the identity of objects and the different elements of its narrative. That is of the utmost importance, because that implies artistic decisions, passionate

decisions, linguistic decisions... We need to recognize that all identities are soft, tenuous, vulnerable... For instance, anything I decide to do at Parque Explora is filled with faith and risk. That is why museology is a high-risk activity, a high-risk sport. But at least we have fun. There is certainly a dose of adrenaline in curators' discussions. We all know that crimes of passion are committed in every decision on how an exhibit is organized, but there is also passionate love. Therefore, I have this question for you: is it desirable -or even convenient- to reorganize a museum based on challenging the given identity of its components, i.e., ants, plus birds, plus plants...? Am I going to challenge them or am I going to accept them as objects with full validity and start building on that basis? Or I can challenge the given relationships between such components, that is, I can take more time choosing a liver for Frankenstein or, eventually, deciding how to sew it all together to make it functional, as the outcome is a result of an exercise in creativity. I would say queer theory presents quite an interesting opportunity to discuss identity in depth, beyond even gender or sexuality, to include all things and how the narratives that connect all things are made. Especially because this theory does not seek to do away with reality, but instead recognizes that there are irreducible spaces of uncertainty that are fun because they offer the possibility for making decisions. Although it does arise from the theory of postmodernism and structural criticism, it does not seek to dissolve reality or put an end to the identity of objects, but merely wonders -not without a certain irony- whether that identity is actually as robust as we believe it to be and, especially -and this is the true ethical issue- what is the effect of buying into that story, that narrative, or believing that reality is ever clearer, more defined, and the objects of knowledge are purer. That perspective is a concern, in my view, because it generates a continuous fragmentation of scripts and the impossibility of connecting once again in meaningful scenarios, or finding those connections that we require for humanity to advance.

Ecological theory and complex systems theory have recently proposed the existence of panarchic cycles to account for the instabilities and apparent contradictions in complex systems, and they argue that it is in that space of instability of objects, where identity becomes worn down, that innovation happens, that adaptation emerges, together with the creativity to take on new challenges and to cause the universe to move in a certain direction, not necessarily teleological, but only so that the universe will remain alive. Therefore, of course, if you accept the criticism against knowledge models which, as I said,

does not seek to destroy such models but -rather- to encourage their constant reinterpretation, I know that this is when art museums and natural science museums emerge upside down, and that is why I am so happy... They emerge with new features that are unpredictable, with new realities [...] At any rate, we should ask ourselves whether the exercise of this ontological doubt that arises from queer theory is ethically satisfying. What are the effects of a discussion between the modern classical perspective of knowledge that still prevails in many museums and which is essential to making sense of the world, and a much more fluid perspective of reality that allows us to risk new narratives and new interpretations of what is happening to us and to the world.

I believe museums can be reimagined as a device to reflect intersubjectivity, i.e., the fact that knowledge is intersubjective, that there are no absolute truths. Not even science claims that, though many political systems do. Museums would thus work as a detector of emerging patterns, new things and new identities that are being created throughout the world, some of them blatantly unfeasible, and some that will give way to gigantic phylogenies. We do not know how we are going to populate Mars, but we will be populating it in a hundred years, and Mars will not be Earth. The museum should be an aesthetic and political correlation of those innovation narratives. There is no government-free museum: no matter how hard we battle every day with the government, they will still tell us what they want and do not want shown, or what they want and do not want discussed.... Funding will always be there as an element of power to define actions. And, finally, the museum appears to reveal that mystery, as the glue that holds realities together, but not some permanent glue that works as an anchor. Thus, I believe that the Queer Museum should not document the monsters of the past, -however attractive and engaging- but should instead help produce the monsters of the future. **FIND OUT MORE IN: QUEER ECOLOGIES**





## Ideas in this chapter are inspired by the following sessions at Reimagining the Museum:

### QUEER ECOLOGY

Brigitte Baptiste (Instituto Humboldt, Colombia)

#PolyphonicMuseums #Unlearn

### THE MUSEUM AS SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTOR

Américo Castilla (Fundación TyPA, Argentina) + David Anderson (National Museum Wales, UK) + Marcelo Araujo (Instituto Brasileiro de Museus, Brazil) + Rob Stein (American Alliance of Museums, US)

#PoliticalIncorrectness  
#CivicResponsibility

### WHAT'S ELAINE HEUMANN GURIAN THINKING ABOUT NOW?

Elaine Heumann Gurian (The Museum Group, US)

#CivicResponsibility

### WHAT'S TERESA MORALES THINKING ABOUT NOW?

Teresa Morales (Red de Museos Comunitarios de América, Mexico)

#NecessaryCollaboration  
#CivicResponsibility

### BRAVE ORGANIZATIONS

Andrés Roldán (Parque Explora, Colombia) + Tony Butler (Derby Museums, UK) + Martha Nubia Bello

(Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia) + Bonita Bennett (District Six Museum, South Africa) + Kaywin Feldman (Minneapolis Institute of Art, US)

#PoliticalIncorrectness  
#CivicResponsibility

### THE FUTURE OF MEMORY

Daniel Castro (Museo Nacional de Colombia, Colombia) + Adriana Valderrama (Museo de Antioquia, Colombia) + Bonita Bennett (District Six Museum, South Africa) + Alejandra Naftal (Museo Sitio de Memoria ESMA, Argentina) + Elizabeth Silkes (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, US)

#ToTellTheUnutterable  
#InMedellín

### THE EXPANSIVE MUSEUM

Claudio Gómez Papic (Museo Nacional de Historia Natural de Chile, Chile) + Diego Golombek (Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, Argentina) + Andrea Bandelli (Science Gallery, Ireland) + Silvia Singer (Museo Interactivo de Economía, Mexico) + Lucía González (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, Colombia)

#AlternativeModels  
#NecessaryCollaboration  
#ElasticMuseum

### EMBRACING DISSONANCE IN THE MUSEUM

Gonzalo Aguilar (Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Argentina) + Armando Perla (Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Canada) + Marilia Bonas (Memorial da Resistência, Brazil) + Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko (Abbe Museum, US)

#PolyphonicMuseums

### COMMUNITIES CAN SHAPE/SHAKE MUSEUMS

Deborah Mack (National Museum of African American History and Culture, US) + Césaréo Moreno (National Museum of Mexican Art, US) + Karima Grant (ImagiNation Afrika, Senegal) + Teresa Morales (Red de Museos Comunitarios de América, Mexico) + Esmeralda Ortiz Cuero (Museo Comunitario de Mulaló, Colombia)

#NecessaryCollaboration  
#ElasticMuseum

You can find the complete audiovisual record at:  
[www.youtube.com/user/FundacionTyPA/](https://www.youtube.com/user/FundacionTyPA/)

# Contact Spaces

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## I Introducción

—> Based on the ideas and proposals that surfaced at Reimagining the Museum, we have adopted three institutional approaches for fostering the values and principles essential for promoting positive social change: humility, understood as an attitude which allows us to acknowledge that we are part of something greater and work in collaboration with other players; empathy, as an attitude which facilitates the acceptance of differences and acknowledges the value of such differences; and activism, as an attitude which challenges established values.

When we look at the projects that museums are currently involved in, we see a growing awareness that neutrality is not an ethically viable stance and that social inequalities demand proactive responses. But while some museums are working to combat conflict, violence and social divisions, others, although adopting a new rhetoric, continue to implement their same practices. The philosophical call to action proposed in the previous chapter requires conscious and sustained support at all levels of an institution, to ensure that the message we are advancing externally is embraced internally. The need to ensure that these values are applied across our institutions means making a commitment not just on a personal level or as a team, but as an institution as a whole.

**David Anderson**  
National Museum Wales, UK

Ever since the 70s, we have seen how education programs and the work with audiences have been gaining ground in European museums. This trend was born in the dark, while large museums continued to be ocean liners which sailed through time. Meanwhile, educators were able to do projects that, in a sense, nobody in much of the rest of the organization cared about, and began to look for a new philosophical model. Since then, what went on below the deck has been trying to push through and become visible and more influential, and the truth of the matter is that at the majority of the London national museums particularly, this change in philosophy continues to be a struggle. **FIND OUT MORE IN: THE MUSEUM AS SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTOR**

**David Anderson**  
National Museum Wales, UK

Co-production projects should be, but often are not, framed by a clear and explicit commitment to

social justice by the entire organization, and not just by an individual project or a small group of staff. However, most museums that use co-production do not make this an explicit commitment. They may pretend that their work is politically neutral, but it is not. Co-production, without an explicit and genuine organizational commitment to social justice, is only injustice in brighter colors.

We now need an institutional code explicitly requiring our museums to place social justice at the center of our work. If we consider the realities of the practice, rather than the rhetoric of co-production, it is clear that our museums' codes of ethics are no longer adequate for the task we face in the real world. But we also need another, entirely different, code, this time for individual professionals, to which we personally commit regardless of what our organizations may do. Like doctors and other professionals who serve the public, our work should be a vocation. Our ultimate loyalty must be to the communities we serve, not to our institutions, if they fail to meet this standard. We must refuse to be complicit in practices by our museums which conceal, and thus perpetuate, deeper inequalities. We should demand a relationship between museums and our communities that brings real change. [FIND OUT MORE IN: CO-CREATION IN MUSEUMS](#)

—> The use of beautiful and powerful words can build a reality, but it can also create the illusion that a reality is being built. This is a particularly delicate issue because of the language museums have created. Words such as co-creation, diversity, inclusion and participation can easily hinder effective action if they are not supported through action.

For many museums, this is a time for small isolated and adaptive gestures, rather than for a substantial change in mindsets. The commitment to social transformation requires a deeper reevaluation as well as sound institutional support that translates into concrete actions.

**Nina Simon**  
Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History,  
US

In my opinion, we are successful when our audience reflects the diversity in our community. We fantasize about museums being democratic places when, in fact, they may be less democratic than some commercial options, whether that be a cocktail bar, a movie theater, which may be more democratic without even intending to. I think we are deluding ourselves if we say that we are more socially

engaged despite the fact that our audience is less reflective of our community. I believe the measure of the success of any museum is whether its audience reflects the diversity of its community. [FIND OUT MORE IN: INSIDE - OUTSIDE: MUSEUMS AND PUBLIC SPACE](#)

**Tony Butler**  
Derby Museums, UK

In order to make the museums of Derby, which are public municipal institutions, more relevant, we have peeled off the layers of our museum one by one and imbedded public participation in everything we do by means of a human-centered design approach. All of our work is co-produced, and we use our collections to frame our methodology. By being driven by the needs, wishes and backgrounds of the people for whom we design our work, we have a clear production framework. [...] We put the exhibition together in full view of the public, so all our curators, all our conservators have to interact with the public. We have gone through a big organizational change in the museum and our curators are now called "co-production curators." Everything they do has to involve the public. We see this as a way of peeling back the layers of the onion of the museum. [FIND OUT MORE IN: BRAVE ORGANIZATIONS](#)

**Kaywin Feldman**  
Minneapolis Institute of Art,  
US

I am certain many of the values and ideas we believe in at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA) are the same as those championed by other museums: we believe in equity, gender equality, the respect of others' points of view, social justice, education, scientific research... The truth is I always believed these things, these values, were naturally accepted and not at all controversial. But right now, in my country, these values are being challenged and are under threat. [FIND OUT MORE IN: BRAVE ORGANIZATIONS](#)

## II Museum Values and the Need to Make Them Evident

—> Recently, more and more museums are shifting their focus to the visitor and, in some cases, to certain communities and the goals they wish or need to reach. As civic and political institutions, it is reasonable to expect that museums should promote core values to their public, values which seek to contribute to social stability and ensure peaceful coexistence. Principles such as respect for others, tolerance, nonviolence, diversity, equity, inclusion, freedom of speech and democracy are also important for museums but, what are the principles that define each institution? Do museums know what values their activities endorse? What are the ideas behind each project? What is the theory behind practice?

The search for answers to these questions is in no way an exercise in abstraction. Concrete steps such as outlining the guiding values of each organization can help facilitate this task. It does not require that we start from scratch. Each museum is part of a tradition that can be reviewed and accepted as a starting point. Part of the answer can also be found in the specific context of each organization: where it is located, who its stakeholders are, whether it is really a public institution. Open discussion and participation are also key because, even though the values associated with museums may seem universally accepted, putting them into practice can cause external and internal tensions that require negotiating priorities and addressing any signs of discord or disagreement.

**Nina Simon**

Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History,  
US

During the first stages of the project for the creation of a public square, Abbott Square, by the museum, we organized hundreds

of talks with the community. We had conversations with business-  
es, homeless people, families, kids, people who never came down-  
town because they hated it, people who lived downtown. We asked  
them how we could improve the city's downtown area, and what  
we could do to have a vibrant community square. They identified  
five things that really mattered to them: they wanted to see art in a  
public space, they wanted a connection to the history of that space,

and they wanted a space where they could spend time with their  
kids. They also said there was no place downtown where they could  
just sit and have a conversation with somebody without being told  
they had to pay for the privilege, like in a restaurant. The museum  
was familiar with the first four needs: art, history, connection and  
play. But people mentioned a fifth need which mattered the most  
to them: food. We didn't know anything about food! We had never  
offered food in our museum! Food is a really hard business. And it  
was not only food; we knew that to do this well we needed not just  
one café next to the museum but many different kinds of food, many  
different kinds of eating and drinking experiences, to make it as dy-  
namic and diverse an experience in terms of what they put in their  
mouth as it would be in terms of the art and history. So, we started  
changing our perception and said: "Okay, we will take this space that  
we were originally focused on and make it a place where people can  
sit, where we will hold events, performances and exhibitions on art  
and history. We will take this back area we were not even thinking  
about and make it a secret garden full of interactive programming  
for children and families, and then let's move out all of our office ten-  
ants, clear this space and turn it into a public market." We now have  
six restaurants and two bars in that downtown space. So, we focused  
on this and we realized we knew how to do things outdoors, but we  
knew nothing about handling a food business. We had to find the  
partner who could deliver the food experience we needed, even if  
that person was not necessarily the person we most wanted to work  
with. [...] One of the biggest values we held to in the negotiation on  
Abbott Square was that the plaza had to be open to anybody. That  
anyone should be allowed to bring their coffee or their tamales or  
their sandwich from home and eat it in that space. There was not  
going to be private seating for restaurant users. And we gave up the  
opportunity to own all the programming to maintain this idea that  
the seating is for everybody because, in my opinion, the essence  
of being a public space, an inclusive space and a space that can  
invite bridging, is actually more important a value than having the  
last word on programming. By the way, in a public space we do not  
really have any authority anyway. We set a table, create a platform,  
but the most successful public spaces are the ones people are using  
for their work meetings and during their free time. **FIND OUT MORE IN:**

**INSIDE - OUTSIDE: MUSEUMS AND PUBLIC SPACE**

**Andrea Bandelli**  
Science Gallery, Ireland

Much of what we do at the Science Gallery [a public science center partnered with Trinity College University in Dublin, Ireland] would probably not be done in a museum because they would say: “We can’t do this type of thing.” That is the typical self-censorship of museums. In a university, everything is allowed if it is legal. At the Science Gallery we seek to work in a manner that always preserves freedom of culture and academic freedom as a value, regardless of how problematic this may be. **FIND OUT MORE IN: [THE EXPANSIVE MUSEUM](#)**

### III Activism, or Culture as a Behavior

—> How do museums position themselves with regard to current events and issues, such as the social tensions arising from cohabitation within the same territory, or the social and environmental consequences of new technologies? Museums can affect these things and the manner in which they are perceived by society through their own symbolic systems. Museum activism does not necessarily have to take the same form as the activism of other social players. A better approach may be found through identifying the unique manner in which each institution can be an activist on the basis of its own values, beliefs, knowledge and expertise. In this sense, activist museums are seen as another player in the social fabric, which places them in a position to support, incentivize and collaborate with other social players such as artists, scientists, designers and politicians who are leading, studying and debating specific causes that are in line with the values of the museum.

**Kaywin Feldman**  
Minneapolis Institute of Art, US

Something I always remind our staff of is the fact that art is political. I mean, political with a small “p.” Every work of art was made with intentionality; it was

made by an artist with a point of view and is an expression of what it is to be human. So, it may not be Political with a capital “P,” but all art is political. [...] This is a time where I believe museums must be political. In the US, we are seeing a surge of hate speech from groups which have, of course, always been there but which have now unfortunately gained power, spaces in which to speak out, to participate in public events, and have a presence in institutions. I would like to believe this is a very small portion of the people, but it is big enough that we are all really conscious of it. **FIND OUT MORE IN: [BRAVE ORGANIZATIONS](#)**

**Andrea Bandelli**  
Science Gallery, Ireland

Think of the current developments in artificial intelligence and 3D printing, new ways of creating materials, new digital systems from Blockchain to quantum computing, all the advances in biology and neuroscience. These have really very profound political consequences in terms of creating or eliminating jobs, creating or expanding inequalities, giving access to treatment or reducing access to treatment. These are really very fundamental aspects of society and they are unknown, they are very complex. There are no unintended consequences of technology. We can shape technology. Therefore, I think that we, as institutions, need to take steps towards becoming activists. **FIND OUT MORE IN: [WHAT’S ANDREA BANDELLI THINKING ABOUT NOW?](#)**

**Marilia Bonas**  
Memorial da Resistência, Brazil

The specific role of museums is working for the resistance. This does not always mean going out to care for homeless people, but in many cases entails supporting those who resist, protecting those who protect us –such as the police– or supporting those who wield specific knowledge such as professional experts. **FIND OUT MORE IN: [EMBRACING DISSONANCE IN THE MUSEUM](#)**

**Andrea Bandelli**  
Science Gallery, Ireland

Activism is when we stand behind our core values, which in our case are science, creativity and the development of new knowledge. Being an activist museum does not mean that you need to take up every issue and fight for it, but it does mean that you stand with the people whose cause it is and support them. Like Nina Simon said, it is about seeing the museum as another actor, as a player with many other players. **FIND OUT MORE IN: [WHAT’S ANDREA BANDELLI THINKING ABOUT NOW?](#)**

—> An activist museum needs others who, in turn, witness its actions and can collaborate with them. Becoming activists means becoming aware of the fact that we are part of society with a role to play in supporting the collective capabilities of other civic entities, and that we can do this jointly and simultaneously with others. If we further embrace the idea that our work must necessarily be connected to that of other players, it follows that the concept of the activist museum should expand to include the museum community as a whole.

**Elaine Heumann Gurian**  
The Museum Group, US

There is a concern that we exist in a bubble. We live in an increasingly polarized world, in which we are less willing to adapt to that which is different and have become more isolated in our own absolute beliefs. If we are indeed activists, at some point –and note there may be some arrogance and aggressiveness in this– I wonder how we can come together with more conservative museums; those who are taking small steps but still contributing in their own way. If we are activists, how are we approaching each other? The idea that museums should use their resources to deliberately fight existing social prejudices remains controversial within the sector. Caution seems to be the prevalent value in a broad sector: “Be careful not to be too political... be careful not to pick a side.” We must be careful not to alienate the more conservative museums and we must even establish alliances with them. Where is the reward for those who are trying to move step by step in our direction? How do we reward those who are taking small steps and undertaking small commitments? If we promote reconciliation and advocate for social responsibility, at least part of our actions should be aimed at building bridges with that sector of the professional museum community. We must work together for the well-being of our community. **FIND OUT MORE IN: CLOSING WORDS**

—> Working with others includes and goes beyond other museums. A process of true social transformation such as the one in Medellín requires the collaborative effort of various public and private players working towards the same goal: in this case, the peace-making process. For the union of such diverse players to be possible, we have to allow for unfinished and imperfect efforts.

**María del Rosario Escobar**  
Museo de Antioquia, Colombia

The first thing I would like to talk about is the idea of “transformation,” and the idea of that largely

debated Medellín model. Visitors and researchers come looking for that Medellín model. What happened? How was the transformation achieved? How was it made possible? When I was a member of the Office of the Secretary of Culture I felt more comfortable with the idea of transformation but in lab conditions, and this is still true in the position I occupy now. I like to think that those of us who participate in this project of transforming the city are working in an experimentation field, a social lab; that we are dealing with an ongoing work rather than a finished model. There is no magic recipe, no equation. Our greatest strength is what we bring with us from our work in our neighborhoods, our everyday lives, our work to find purpose in our actions in our street, our block, our home, our private lives. From neighborhoods we move to a public and urban scenario. I believe that was the starting point of the seminars on alternative medicine for the future, which later turned into a model for the construction of public affairs, which continues to exist to this date in various scenarios, such as the Presidential Council for Medellín, in a WhatsApp group, in various meetings. It translates once again into that strength that comes from civil society, from experimentation, from thoughts, from the work that puts things into action, from the ideas we develop every day. It translates, as I said before, more into a lab than a model.

The other lesson I believe we can learn from the case of Medellín is Medellín’s consistently critical spirit, which cannot be lost in the world of politics, with a small “p,” in surveys, in opinion polls, even on Twitter, which is a new arena to voice one’s opinions. Critical spirit cannot be lost. It was precisely the idea that we did not feel comfortable with the city we were living and working in that brought us together to reappraise it and change it. It was born from discomfort, a discomfort that cannot be exhausted in Medellín. It is the discomfort felt by the civil society, by working men, by the excluded, and also the discomfort with citizen participation mechanisms. If that critical spirit is numbed, we can fall into that which others have dubbed regionalism, an idea that is also present in our culture and our cities, a chauvinism into which we regretfully fall sometimes and which must be perceived more as a form of care, of recognition, of building on what has already been built, but which must be accompanied by a permanently critical view of who we have been and what we have done. I believe that, in this sense, when Juan Luis Mejía, dean of EAFIT University, talks about a palimpsest, what he means is something that is built over time, a process, but which also

allows for a critical view. I believe that nowadays, in Medellín, that exercise of criticism is sometimes questioned or viewed as a mere exercise in opposition, when, if analyzed as a lab condition, it is simply a matter of construction, a work in which we, as a society, allow ourselves to try and err, and add up the results. It is a natural and necessary exercise in which the civil society speaks once more, regains its voice. And here I will use once again the example of work: How do we build? This question gets asked a lot in Medellín. What is it about Medellín that makes it different from other cities? I believe it is a model in which public and private entities come together at the main working tables of institutions or the city's public projects to generate large movements, as was the case with culture, education and the city's urbanization projects. **FIND OUT MORE IN: THE CITY OF MEDELLIN'S STORY**

**Sergio Restrepo**  
Claustro Confama, Colombia

There is a reality, and that is that we are all public players, just as we are all inhabitants of the streets, we are all pedestrians and we are all citizens. That is reality. Thus, making public institutions uncomfortable is making ourselves uncomfortable, disrupting ourselves. It is easier to manage public affairs in a manner that is comfortable for the administration. When we choose discomfort, we must have a clear financial plan and be always aware of the fact we are working for an institution, and if that institution fails it is our fault. Mind you, you are responsible [...] We have to measure the consequences of this very carefully. **FIND OUT MORE IN: NEW HORIZONS: COLLABORATIONS FOR GREATER COMMUNITY IMPACT**

—> Sometimes, museums have to acknowledge that they are not only part of a political and public ecosystem, but can also become key players. It is also important to acknowledge that museums, like many other cultural institutions, may assume responsibility for addressing social problems, and in assuming that responsibility may wish to take on key transformational roles.

**Juan Luis Mejía Arango**  
Universidad EAFIT, Colombia

Nowadays we have some 18 or 19 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, but we feel it is very hard to bring down those numbers; we have stagnated. [...] Half those murders do not result from conflicts between gangs or “combos,” but from intolerance. And that is an issue where culture has something to say, an issue where we have to go beyond the very idea of culture as a

set of cultural expressions we have developed so far. We must think of those areas where culture consists not only of expressions but of behaviors, because half those murders are due to intolerance. So, we have there an area that no longer depends exclusively on the actions of security forces, but where culture has something to say; the coexistence of its citizens. **FIND OUT MORE IN: MEDELLIN, AN URBAN PALIMPSEST**

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## IV Empathy, or Plurality as Comfort

—> New kinds of collaborations and partnerships can lead to spaces where we encounter the unknown, creating uncertainties that challenge us to negotiate, compromise, and build trust. Many of the concerns museum professionals have do not necessarily resonate with the community, which, for the most part, has no expectations of museums. The challenge lies not in talking to peers, those who share our same interests, perspectives and problems, but in getting the museum to connect with those who think differently from us.

**Carol Rogers**  
Liverpool Museums, UK

We are facing an interesting challenge in all of our community work: that of creating an environment where we can manage our expectations while honestly responding to the communities that challenge us as an institution. When we brought young people into the museum for the Postcode project, in order to make the space completely available to them we had to work with our marketing team, our curators, our customer care team, etc. The challenge affected the entire organization, inasmuch as we had to work differently with a group of young people who did not want to come into the museum and so we could no longer continue to do things the old way. We have our way of exhibiting, curating, displaying, and we have our standards for our public, and all of that had to be rethought [...] I believe when we work with others the challenge is not so much about just identifying the relationship but making the relationship work for everyone. In every

project that I've encountered I never assume at the beginning that we know everything; there's always learning for us as an institution and also, I think, learning for the community. **FIND OUT MORE IN: NEW HORIZONS: COLLABORATIONS FOR GREATER COMMUNITY IMPACT**

**Gonzalo Aguilar**

Universidad Nacional de San Martín,  
Argentina

How do we talk about others? By referring to others we are always defining them somehow, and by referring to and defining them we

are also taking a stance, the stance of one who dominates another. How do we refer to others? As subordinates, dominated, poor, illiterate, minorities; in the case of indigenous peoples, as natives, original peoples, etc. This polyphony entails a very important conceptual struggle. Going back to the very important question posed some time ago by Spivak regarding whether a subordinate can speak, I wonder whether a subordinate or subordinates can access a museum. When we talk about accessing a museum we are not thinking exclusively about a visitor who arrives at the institution, but about all of the rules a museum has, all of the different levels a museum has. We can think of the British Museum, one of the most traditional and most conservative museums in existence; and we can say that subordinates have somehow managed to get in. They accessed it under a colonialist view, an imperialist view, and that is somehow the problem: Under what terms do subordinates access museums? **FIND OUT MORE IN: EMBRACING DISSONANCE IN THE MUSEUM**

—>If we understand empathy as a positive predisposition towards the unknown, as the ability to value the unexpected, it becomes possible for us to value that which is different rather than see it as a threat. When facing the unknown, museums can search for mechanisms to be comfortable with differences and, especially, to make those differences feel comfortable. On the other hand, empathy depends to a great extent on the development of self-awareness. To facilitate empathy, it is good for an organization to know itself and see itself reflected in its own values.

**Andrea Bandelli**

Science Gallery, Ireland

The core values of the Science Gallery are “connect, participate and surprise;” that is what drives

everything we do. All three values are really about empathy, about creating a possibility to connect with other people, with different people. These three core values are the building blocks of empathy. A

lot of the work we do is also unsettling, controversial and difficult, and these values allow us to acknowledge that what is different, unexpected, what is unknown, is not a threat but something we can appreciate. If you think especially of the developments in science and technology today, you can see that these disciplines have moved forward in many directions that are very different from what we expect or think. [...] Moreover, empathy also connects museums with their times, inasmuch as there is a certain lack of understanding of current phenomena as they unfold. In our comfort zone we create our version of past facts, and theorize and articulate them with a validated narrative, but museums must be alert and sensitive to what is going on right now. At the Science Gallery we work a lot with artists. The real value of art lies in its ability to confront us with what is different, to prepare us, to accept that which is different, to create a space for us to connect with those who are different from ourselves and be surprised. There is no empathy in connecting with people who are like us, that is, in bonding. Differences are not a threat, but something we can appreciate. Art is a tool to create empathy. That is the power of art: to create empathy. And I really think there is a deficit of empathy in this world. It shocks me how many times people see other people as commodities; you can switch them off, you can unfriend them, mute them, or scroll left and right and delete them. I think that is really a sign of our deficit of empathy. **FIND OUT MORE IN: WHAT'S ANDREA BANDELLI THINKING ABOUT NOW?**

—> How comfortable are we taking a cognitive or an emotional or affective trait usually associated with individuals into the world of organizations? Mixing emotions and organizations may seem strange, as the mistrust exists that a certain degree of emotion trivializes the commitment to scholarly and scientific rigor. On the face of it, the concept of empathy seems more acceptable when we talk about museums that work with sensitive societal issues, such as racism, discrimination, violence, or war, and the consequent emotions of the victims. But when we consider other disciplines – as in the case of science museums, for example, which many believe have problems to solve that are not tied to feelings or emotion–, how do we link the apparent neutrality of certain types of knowledge to the human component, which includes that which is profoundly subjective, personal and emotional?

**Andrea Bandelli**

Science Gallery, Ireland

First and foremost, we need to acknowledge that while the scientific method is rational, science is not. Science depends on emotions because it is done by people



with emotions, and that influences the way science is done. There is research that shows that the lack of diversity in science produces biased results. The human component is a part of science, and we must acknowledge this. We must also acknowledge that rational thinking and the scientific method are different from the cultural interpretation of science. There is nothing wrong in having emotional ways to talk about science, but that is different from science. I think the quest for knowledge and methods that you can talk about is the defining factor, and this is also very similar between science and art. It is a way to be creative and not to be afraid to talk about the unknown. But, at the same time, we must always keep in mind that the rationality of the method is embodied by people. At the Science Gallery, we seek to have conversations. I would really love to study in depth the conversations that arise in the gallery between the public and the mediators. That is where power can really be found, at the intersection of scientific knowledge and subjectivity. **FIND OUT MORE IN: WHAT'S ANDREA BANDELLI THINKING ABOUT NOW?**

—>Those who visit museums usually do so to share an experience in the company of their friends or families. It is not common for them to connect with strangers or for the institution to become a place where bridges are built among communities. If our goal is to provide cohesion in a fragmented society, the question is whether it is possible to reimagine museums from the point of view of those on the outside, those who choose not to enter. This is where we can exercise empathy, although our empathy should also extend to those on the inside -- the traditional users of our museums — to help them reimagine with us a museum that is more open and inviting to outsiders. The barriers between the inside and the outside are not defined only by physical elements or building features. Wider entrance gates or more attractive signs help communities notice the existence of the museum, but have no major effects on the expectations they may have of it. For that to happen, museums need to connect to their communities.

**Nina Simon**

Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History,  
US

When we talk about doors and rooms immediately we start talking about who the insiders are and who the outsiders are. I have spent my entire career in museums focusing on outsiders because I believe that our museums will reach their highest purpose when we invite everybody in, not just the people who already have a key in their pocket.

But it is not easy to invite an outsider in. I think we have this fantasy that the way to invite everyone in is to just open our existing doors wider. We take what we already have: the teams, the resources, the programs, and just open those doors wider, and outsiders will come in. Well, any of you who has done this work will know that it does not work this way, because outsiders walk pass those open doors, which they do not see as open. In our experience, change looks more like a progressive overlapping of internal and external spaces. We started with the resources and programs we had, the traditional art and history museum we had, and we grew from that.

There is a safe side to this story, and it is very important: most of the people who already used to come, stayed. Fewer of them left than we thought. However, there is also a scary side to this story: in order to invite in all these new outsiders we had to tear down perfectly nice walls in our metaphorical room, and build new doors for new people. For those on the outside that was very exciting, they saw a door where they just used to see a wall. They were intrigued. They wanted to come in. But from the inside it was very confusing, distressing: “Why can’t outsiders just come through the doors that work well for me?” “Why did you have to make a mess and put a new door over there for somebody else?” Let me give you an example of what this looks like. A pop up museum is a museum anybody can make, anywhere, on any topic. The night before Valentine’s Day we created our first ever pop up museum, inspired by the Museum of Broken Relationships. The theme was “Fuck my ex.” The idea was you could bring an object from a failed relationship and handwrite a label for it, and we laid those objects around the pop up museum. I think you can probably imagine for some of the outsiders in our college town, a progressive town, the flyer was a key to a door they did not know existed before. We gave a flyer to people and they said: “Wow! I didn’t know we had a museum. This looks fun. This looks cool. I’m going to come.” I think you can also probably imagine that insiders, the people in our inner circle, who saw this flyer, were greatly distressed. Not just by the word “fuck,” but by the irreverence of the program, even the ephemerality of it. [...] Some things are a little harder to deal with, such as this: when we were developing this theory of change and talking about how to empower outsiders who feel unwelcome, one of our trustees said: “I don’t get it, I love museums, I go to them to learn, I go for pleasure, I don’t go to a museum to be empowered.” I turned to her and said: “I understand, but you are the Mayor of Santa Cruz, I’m pretty sure you have a lot of other opportunities to be empowered in our community.”

This though is an insider we do not want to push away, but somebody we want to invite to have a new idea regarding this construction she does not yet understand. Instead of feeling like she needs to hold on to her idea of a museum, we invited her to feel like she can be generous and brave in helping us open it up for new people in new ways. New people like Jasmine Avila, a young Latino woman who sent me an e-mail saying: "Growing up in Los Angeles, I was surrounded by my culture. There were constant reminders of who I am. Santa Cruz always felt like something was missing, like parts of me were missing, even after living here for seven years. The MAH is special to me because it fills that gap. It reflects my story, my history, and my culture." Then she goes on to talk about how, as an outsider, she felt welcomed, and she felt that her Latino culture is celebrated in our museum, and how she feels a sense of belonging not just in the museum but also in our community for the first time in seven years. Now, I would like to say that, whenever we can, we are a "Museum of And" in the words of Elaine Heumann Gurian's fabulous essay. We do not like to choose between insiders and outsiders. We like to say we are building bigger rooms with lots of doors for different people to come in. But every once in a while, we have to choose. And when I have to choose between empowering an outsider who has not felt a sense of belonging in our community in seven years and satisfying an insider's confusion, I will always choose outsiders and I will always work with insiders to invite them to be generous, to be brave, to participate, to be proud of opening our museum to new people, so that we can be the most valuable and meaningful civic resource we can be. Where do you find the Jasmines of this world? It is very easy. You go outside. You leave the building, you leave your metaphorical room because, ultimately, relevance is not about you building a program and selling it to somebody, it is about exercising empathy, about really understanding how it feels to be that stranger outside the room, trying to figure out whether this is meant for you or not. **FIND OUT MORE IN: THE ART OF RELEVANCE**

## V Humility, or Spontaneity as Willingness

—> Humility is understood as the ability of individuals and organizations to understand what their own skills are and to share them. It may also be expressed by museums acknowledging that there are others in the community who are also doing their work, at the same time and often with the same goals, and understanding that they are neither more important nor more proficient than these other players who are also imbedded in the larger social fabric typical of public institutions.

**Andrea Bandelli**  
Science Gallery, Ireland

We hear a lot about the importance of acting and taking action. The global political climate calls for action but it also creates a lot of anger, and I think humility is the antidote to anger. This is really very important because, if we give in to anger, then powerful and dangerous feelings come out on top. Humility is really our way to stay away from anger and to protect ourselves from anger. Humility is a very interesting value. We always feel admiration when someone is described by others as being humble, but we are also afraid of being humble. I am fascinated by this opposing way of dealing with humility: we admire it in others but it kind of scares us, and I believe it scares us because it is a really wonderful value. Why do I believe humility is so important? Because it is actually our way to be strong. Because we are always afraid of appearing weak, of being humiliated, and being really humble means being above that. Therefore, it is really a sign of strength, and it's also a way to be self-confident, because someone who is humble, really humble, is also very self-confident. So, I think that humility should really be a value imbedded in our work, and should be at the top of the list of values that drive institutions. Humility is also what enables inclusion and the willingness to be inclusive, because we do not have anything to prove or to project on other people. **FIND OUT MORE IN: WHAT'S ANDREA BANDELLI THINKING ABOUT NOW?**

**Matteo Merzagora**

TRACES- Espace des Sciences Pierre  
Gilles de Gennes, France

We live in a world of science communications which tends to be a bit disconnected from the world as people experience it, and especially from the things people deem relevant. Being able to connect to something which is relevant for the audience and being able to let the audience define the relevance of your activities is the main learning tool we have. I mean, we can let go of the power to decide what is important, and we start to do this by focusing on what people know, and by “people” I mean audiences, experts, semi-experts. **FIND OUT MORE IN: NEW HORIZONS: COLLABORATIONS FOR GREATER COMMUNITY IMPACT**

—> Acknowledging that a museum does not hold all of the wisdom is not the same as claiming that it is a mere transmitter of others’ wisdom (limiting its role to that of a supplier of content), and it does not mean that it has no specific knowledge (and thus becomes mere window decoration of the wisdom of a certain discipline, such as anthropology or history). On the contrary, it entails the search for a redefinition of expert knowledge, how it is built, and what the museum’s responsibility is in that process. Acknowledging a diversity of wisdom – knowledge, experiences, insights – entails redefining knowledge-building processes and spaces, and creates possibilities for opening up the traditional practice of separating knowledge production from the communication of knowledge. Museums have a specific wisdom which complements other forms of knowledge. Within its space, it acknowledges what it knows and generates a dialogue with other forms of knowledge. In that dialogue, museums can become a platform for the generation of knowledge instead of mere disseminators.

**Matteo Merzagora**

TRACES- Espace des Sciences Pierre  
Gilles de Gennes, France

What is the rationale behind our actions as a science center? We start from the idea that very often we tend to see two separate

worlds, where one is the knowledge production system and the other one is the knowledge sharing system. On the one side we have scientists, experts, research centers, scientific journals, the entire knowledge production system. On the other hand, we have museums, the public, the media, science centers, festivals, cultural events, all that has been created to diffuse this knowledge. This is the typical scenario in the world of science. We used to say that our main goal was to allow the people to access this knowledge production system and foster a more

dialogical discussion between both spheres. This is called the dialogue model. What we are trying to demonstrate is that this is insufficient and that really interesting things happen in the grey area between knowledge production and knowledge sharing. This is the area in which the people who know and the people who supposedly do not know have a common agenda, a space in which we cannot know for sure who is the expert and who is the one who is supposed to learn. This is the area that is really interesting for scientific culture and scientific communication. We believe that most of our efforts as a museum should be there, in that grey area; that science centers and museums should become something like research facilities, research tools. They should explore all the links between scientific research and society, art, culture and innovation, which is why they should also be knowledge production devices and not only knowledge sharing devices. Of course, this created the need for innovative partnerships in which scientists, founders and the public come into play. By way of example, the last exhibition we held was called “Science Frugale,” Frugal Science. [...] We based this exhibition on four principles. First, we thought of exhibitions as a form of exploration: they are not there to expose knowledge which has already been produced, but to pose a question, in this case: Can we make science at a very low price by hacking old technologies? We then gathered a lot of knowledge connected with this question through a system called “the living lab.” So, exhibitions are a means to produce knowledge, not to expose knowledge. Then, we did something called “open incubation”: we officially opened the exhibition three months before there even was an exhibition. During that time, we did everything openly. Everything that is usually done behind closed doors –meeting scientists to gather information on what to do, looking for a community that could be interested in our work– we did with our doors opened. Instead of inviting them into our offices, we said: “Let’s hold a seminar. Someone will come.” And the public who came also contributed to the exhibition, which leads us to another innovation, co-construction. Simply put, one hundred percent of this exhibition was built by the public. Instead of building the objects ourselves and exposing them, we invited the public –children or engineers, depending on the complexity of the objects– to participate in workshops, and everything was done in a public space. We also had a person who was designated the exhibition narrator and biographer. Since the exhibition was changing all the time we thought we needed a biographer, someone to draw or narrate everything that happened in it. This person is now as important as the curator, a security guard or a guide. The narrator has to be there. **FIND OUT MORE IN: NEW HORIZONS: COLLABORATIONS FOR GREATER COMMUNITY IMPACT**

—> Humility can help to refocus our efforts and allows us to think in other scales. It can help us understand that smallness can be an asset, an advantage. It takes humility to do something small,. It takes humility to lead with ideas and actions and not with name-recognition or prestige. Humility calls for us to do what is needed, to go beyond the tasks that are essential and undertake those which are challenging. By acknowledging the power of humility, it is possible to become big. If the bravest move is doing something simple rather than something huge and complex, how can we assess the impact of simple actions? What new models are available to us to measure our effectiveness and for formulating standards that go beyond quantification (beyond counting visitors or tracking website analytics). Magnitude does not necessarily correlate to impact in terms of projects that focus on social and cultural transformation, which requires actions that are appropriately scaled to context. In those cases, strategies are imbedded deep within actions rather than focusing on their surface effects.

**Carla Pinochet Cobos**

Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile

What is smallness? What do we associate it with and what are its attributes? I really want to reflect

on what smallness is in the field of museums, focusing on the task of turning an adjective –small– into a substantive condition, something that is the very core of a concept. When we talk about things that are small, using that word as an adjective, we are passing a judgment that always requires a point of reference, that is, we are measuring that thing against something bigger. However, if we think about smallness as a condition, we can understand it as an affirmative concept, a starting point for what we are going to do. So, I would like us to think of smallness as a scale of its own, as an autonomous scale. Smallness, as a noun, finds a space to unfold in diversity and connect with that which is not homogeneous; for example, that which is local, close to us, or maybe the fabric of the community. Smallness can thus mean many different things. [...] If we manage to see smallness as its own scale, as a noun, I believe we will find Latin American museums have exceeded the Western, metropolitan definition of museum, to become many other things, different things. I would like to talk about that plasticity, which I will synthesize in a concept that may sound pompous or complex: the idea of a “performative museum.” I will elaborate on two ideas on what “performative” means so you can understand what I am talking about, which is much simpler than it may sound from this undoubtedly very academic term. First,

when we say something is performative, we are referencing its ability to create through enunciation, to say: “This is a museum.” What we call a museum in these latitudes probably does not fit that long list of elements settled upon by international institutions, or cannot perform all of their tasks well or equally as well. However, when we choose to take the idea of a museum as the horizon we strive to reach, as an expectation, we see that the notion broadens, expands, and allows us to refer to other types of practices which may not fall within the definition of museum in a very orthodox scenario. We talk about performative, first, as the ability to create through saying, through enunciation. But, primarily, performativity has to do with something else: that which is built on the go, in practice, while doing. It means working to meet what our contexts require, our daily needs. Thus, even though they may have a specific origin, we see how curatorial guidelines expand and transform. We see teams looking at each other and understanding, on the go, what it is they are really doing and refocusing their expectations and practices, their work, to fit that. That is what is taking shape in these performative museums, and is far from being established by a decree aimed at setting the boundaries of museum activities once and forever. Many Latin American museums are, precisely, open to this non-closed pattern, which is under constant transformation, which seeks to follow the tracks of a society, which is never static but in constant change. **FIND OUT MORE IN: SMALL IS THE NEW SKILL**

—> Humility can lend dignity to smallness, just like unpretentiousness contributes to the search for the best way to initiate a conversation. Abandoning the pursuit of recognition can allow institutions to appreciate the social gestures and signs which go beyond quantitative measurements.

**Alejandra Estrada**

Laboratorio del Espíritu, Colombia

We know there are many substantive problems we will not be able to solve, but the encounters

in which we hand out our newspapers and read them out loud are amazing. We want people to lose that laziness associated with written words, with familiarizing oneself with reading. Most participants are functionally illiterate, inasmuch as they have no access to reading materials. They tell me: “The only newspaper I ever got was the one that the ‘panela’<sup>1</sup> was wrapped in.” So it is kind of a familiarization, a conversation, something very, very simple. I feel this is a hyper-contextualized project, where we discuss issues we are all interested

in. We are all afraid of water pollution, afraid of erosion, of deforestation, but we treat these issues in a very localized manner, so localized that the newspaper is of great interest for all “guarceños” [the inhabitants of the El Retiro municipality], but for other people it is almost a National Geographic article. There is something I really like: We are not only a museum, we are also part of the media. We are very invested in changing things. And I really like that we are not, as a local saying goes, inventing warm water. It is not like “Wow, what an amazing solution.” No, it is just a newspaper, something that has been around for several centuries, but it is extremely efficient for reaching our goal, and maybe replicating a museum here would be useless. Many families collect our newspapers, take them home, some peruse them while drinking their coffee, and that is our way to imbed ourselves in those activities. It has everything to do with dignity. For a Colombian rural community, receiving something dignified, pretty, well done, with care, with great photographs, means a lot. We have authors who are also like local celebrities. And we have been getting articles from local farmers for a year now. I remember how, when the first article arrived, I burst into tears, because that meant they were expecting us, we existed, we were known, and it was a beautiful experience because they were descriptions of the history of the vereda <sup>2</sup> and they were the most beautiful thing because they were very simple: “Look, this is how we used to eat and now we eat like this.” This has already happened with three veredas. On top of that, they write as a community... there is a lot of dissidence, because we have new writers who come together with our usual writers, but it works, it works really well. There is a tangential aspect of this which I also like: the feeling that we are there even when no one else is listening, the city does not care and maybe the country does not care either, but we are there. I sometimes feel we are a little bit like guinea pigs or possums, which bury seeds and don't know that the woods they are in grew from the seeds they planted in the past. I like to think that. We are there, without pretensions, willing to establish a very calm conversation. There is, at least, a very honest dynamic, a very calm dynamic, about it. **FIND OUT MORE IN: [SMALL IS THE NEW SKILL](#)**

<sup>1</sup> Pieces of sugar shaped like prisms or truncated cones.

<sup>2</sup> In Colombia, this is an administrative division within a municipality or parish.



## Ideas in this chapter are inspired by the following sessions at Reimagining the Museum:

### MEDELLÍN, AN URBAN PALIMPSEST

Juan Luis Mejía Arango (Universidad EAFIT, Colombia)  
#InMedellín

### THE ART OF RELEVANCE

Nina Simon (Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, US)  
#CivicResponsibility #ElasticMuseum

### CLOSING WORDS

María Eugenia Salcedo Repolés (Instituto Inhotim, Brazil) + Elaine Heumann Gurian (The Museum Group, US)

### THE MUSEUM AS SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTOR

Américo Castilla (Fundación TyPA, Argentina) + David Anderson (National Museum Wales, UK) + Marcelo Araujo (Instituto Brasileiro de Museus, Brazil) + Rob Stein (American Alliance of Museums, US)  
#PoliticalIncorrectness #CivicResponsibility

### BRAVE ORGANIZATIONS

Andrés Roldán (Parque Explora, Colombia) + Tony Butler (Derby Museums, UK) + Martha Nubia Bello (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia) + Bonita Bennett (District Six Museum, South Africa) + Kaywin Feldman (Minneapolis Institute of Art, US)  
#PoliticalIncorrectness #CivicResponsibility

### WHAT'S ANDREA BANDELLI THINKING ABOUT NOW?

Andrea Bandelli (Science Gallery, Ireland)  
#CivicResponsibility  
#ElasticMuseum

### CO-CREATION IN MUSEUMS

Américo Castilla (Fundación TyPA, Argentina) + Germán Rey (professor and researcher in communication and culture, Colombia) + Kathleen McLean

(Independent Exhibitions, US) + David Anderson (National Museum Wales, UK) + Sebastián Bosch (Museo Gallardo de Ciencias Naturales, Argentina) + Tony Butler (Derby Museums, UK) + Alesha Mercado (LACMA, Mexico) + Armando Perla (Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Canada) + Nina Simon (Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, US).  
#NecessaryCollaboration  
#Unlearn

### INSIDE - OUTSIDE: MUSEUMS AND PUBLIC SPACE

Suzanne MacLeod (Leicester University, UK) + Nina Simon (Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, US) + Ángela María Pérez (Banco de la República, Colombia) + Nisa Mackie (Walker Art Center, US) + María Mercedes González (Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Colombia).  
#CivicResponsibility

### THE EXPANSIVE MUSEUM

Claudio Gómez Papic (Museo Nacional de Historia Natural de Chile, Chile) + Diego Golombek (Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, Argentina) + Andrea Bandelli (Science Gallery, Ireland) + Silvia Singer (Museo Interactivo de Economía, Mexico) + Lucía González (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, Colombia).  
#AlternativeModels  
#NecessaryCollaboration #ElasticMuseum

### EMBRACING DISSONANCE IN THE MUSEUM

Gonzalo Aguilar (Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Argentina) + Armando Perla (Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Canada) + Marilia Bonas (Memorial da Resistência, Brazil) + Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko (Abbe Museum, US)  
#PolyphonicMuseums

### THE CITY OF MEDELLÍN'S STORY

Marta Elena Bravo (Universidad Nacional de Colombia and Parque Explora, Colombia) + Juan Luis Mejía Arango (Universidad EAFIT, Colombia) + Jorge Blandón (social leader, Colombia) + María del Rosario Escobar (Museo de Antioquia, Colombia)  
#InMedellín

### NEW HORIZONS: COLLABORATIONS FOR GREATER COMMUNITY IMPACT

Florencia González de Langarica (Fundación TyPA, Argentina) + Carol Rogers (Liverpool Museums, UK) + Matteo Merzagora (TRACES - Espace des Sciences Pierre Gilles de Gennes, France) + Gelton Pinto Coelho Filho (Circuito Cultural Liberdade de Belo Horizonte, Brazil) + Sergio Restrepo (Claustro Confama, Colombia)  
#NecessaryCollaboration  
#ElasticMuseum

### SMALL IS THE NEW SKILL

Nicolás Testoni (Ferrowhite Museo-taller, Argentina) + Sebastián Bosch (Museo Gallardo de Ciencias Naturales, Argentina) + Carla Pinochet Cobos (Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile) + Johanna Pires (Museu Paço do Frevo, Brazil) + Alejandra Estrada (Laboratorio del Espíritu, Colombia)  
#ElasticMuseum

You can find the complete audiovisual record at:  
[www.youtube.com/user/FundacionTyPA/](https://www.youtube.com/user/FundacionTyPA/)

## I Glossary of projects

Advocating persuasively for issues or ideas does not always ensure their implementation. Presentations at the On Stage and The Crowning events demonstrated how visionary ideas, through organizational will, became concrete projects.

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Carolina Chacón Bernal  
(Museo de Antioquia, Colombia)

**Decolonizing the Museum**

#InMedellin

#CivicResponsibility

#PolyphonicMuseums



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Roberto A. Maduro  
(Biomuseo, Panama)

**Come Back to Earth!**

#Unlearn



Fernanda Venegas Adriaol  
(Museo de la Educación Gabriela  
Mistral, Chile)

**Penguin Revolution at the Museum**

#CivicResponsibility  
#PoliticalIncorrectness



James Yarlynon Jarupia Domicó  
(Asociación de Cabildos Mayores  
Embera Katíos del Alto Sinú,  
Colombia)

**Recognition and Cultural Preservation  
in the Colombian Conflict**

#PolyphonicMuseums



Christian Díaz  
(Habemus, Argentina)

**On Air: We Hack the Museums**

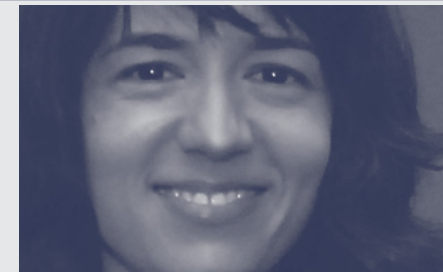
#ElasticMuseum



Gabriela Aidar (Pinacoteca do  
Estado de São Paulo, Brazil)

**Museums and Social Educators**

#NecessaryCollaboration  
#Educators



Belén Santillán  
(Centro de Arte Contemporáneo,  
Ecuador)

**How do we (Re) create a  
Contemporary Art Center?**

#Unlearn #CollectiveIndividual



Diana Lizbeth Andrade Torres  
(Papalote Museo del Niño, Mexico)

**ABC Papalote Educational Program**

#Educators



Adrienne Chadwick  
(Pérez Art Museum Miami, US)

**Art Detectives at Pérez Art  
Museum Miami**

#NecessaryCollaboration  
#CivicResponsibility



Manuel Fernando Camperos Durán  
(COLCIENCIAS - Dto. Administrativo  
de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación,  
Colombia)

**Tell Me, How Do You Envision Your  
Science Center?**

#NecessaryCollaboration



Mónica Haydee Amieva Montañez  
(Museo Universitario de Arte  
Contemporáneo, Mexico)

**Pedagogies of Contingency**

#Unlearn



Robin Groesbeck  
(Crystal Bridges Museum of  
American Art, US)

**Empathy and Dissent in Border  
Cantos**

#CivicResponsibility





Kelly McKinley  
(Oakland Museum of California, US)  
**All Power to the People: A Story of Revolution Through Inclusion**  
**#PoliticalIncorrectness**  
**#NecessaryCollaboration**



Marcela Bañados Norero  
(Museo Taller, Chile)  
**Intuition Guides Us**  
**#Unlearn #AlternativeModels**



Carlos Hoyos Bucheli  
(Museo La Tertulia, Colombia)  
**Museum + School**  
**#NecessaryCollaboration #School**



Mariana del Val (Museo Evita, Palacio Ferreyra, Argentina)  
**Vaivén Project**  
**#NecessaryCollaboration**



Katherine Annlise Román Aquino  
(Museo de Sitio Julio C. Tello de Paracas, Peru)  
**Last Chance**  
**#CollectiveIndividual**  
**#ElasticMuseum**



Claudia Beatriz Ferretto  
(Museo de Arte Eduardo Minnicelli, Argentina)  
**Less is Sometimes More**  
**#ElasticMuseum**



Myriam Springuel (Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), US)  
**Un-learning and Re-learning Customer Focus**  
**#Unlearn**



Alicia Cristina Martín (Museo Benito Quinquela Martín, Argentina)  
**The Museum in an Era of Selfies**  
**#NecessaryCollaboration**  
**#Adolescents**



Gonzalo Martínez (Reich+Petch Design International, Canada)  
**The Importance of Addressing Difficult Societal Issues in Museums: The YouthLink Model**  
**#CivicResponsibility**



Lucía Bianco (Museo del Puerto del Ingeniero White, Argentina)  
**Is 600 Kilos of Onion Enough? Regional Symposium of Feasts**  
**#ElasticMuseum**  
**#NecessaryCollaboration**



Andrés Alberto Duque García  
(Museo de Arte de Pereira,  
Colombia)

**Neighbor in the Window:  
Broadcasting Through the Backdoor**

#ElasticMuseum  
#TakeOutTheExhibitions



Bárbara Elmúdesi (MAM Chiloé /  
Museo Austral, Chile)

**The History of an Object**

#Unlearn #NecessaryCollaboration



Michael Andrés Forero Parra  
(Museo Q, Colombia)

**Moving the Q**

#PolyphonicMuseums #Unlearn



Natalia Segurado (Museo Provincial  
de Bellas Artes Franklin Rawson,  
Argentina)

**Mobile Network**

#ElasticMuseum  
#NecessaryCollaboration



## ■ Glossary of ideas

Throughout this publication several topics and connections emerge and intersect. Overarching concepts are highlighted in each session with a hashtag.

### **#NecessaryCollaboration:**

Forging new collaborations that not only achieve common aims but exceed expectations in striving for the ideal within the museum, broader communities, and society.

libraries, parks, social organizations, artists, fairs and festivals, collectives, designers and the hacker philosophy.

### **#ElasticMuseum:**

Undertaking opportunities, knowledge, connections and allies that can expand impact.

### **#CollectiveIndividual:**

Exploring leadership that seeks input and consensus to best inform new ideas, fosters and sustains organizational change, and nurtures a culture for risk taking.

### **#PoliticalIncorrectness:**

Taking risks that may be controversial or challenge political norms.

### **#CivicResponsibility:**

Exploring how museums are engaged with, and responsive to, external forces and events.

### **#AlternativeModels:**

Redefining the way museums operate by taking a cue from

—>

**#InMedellín:**

Learning how the city of Medellín, the host site, leveraged its cultural assets to become a model for urban transformation and social inclusion.

**#ToTellTheUnutterable:**

Understanding how collective memory in museums serves as a vital connection between the past and the future, dissonance and reconciliation, and fragility and strength.

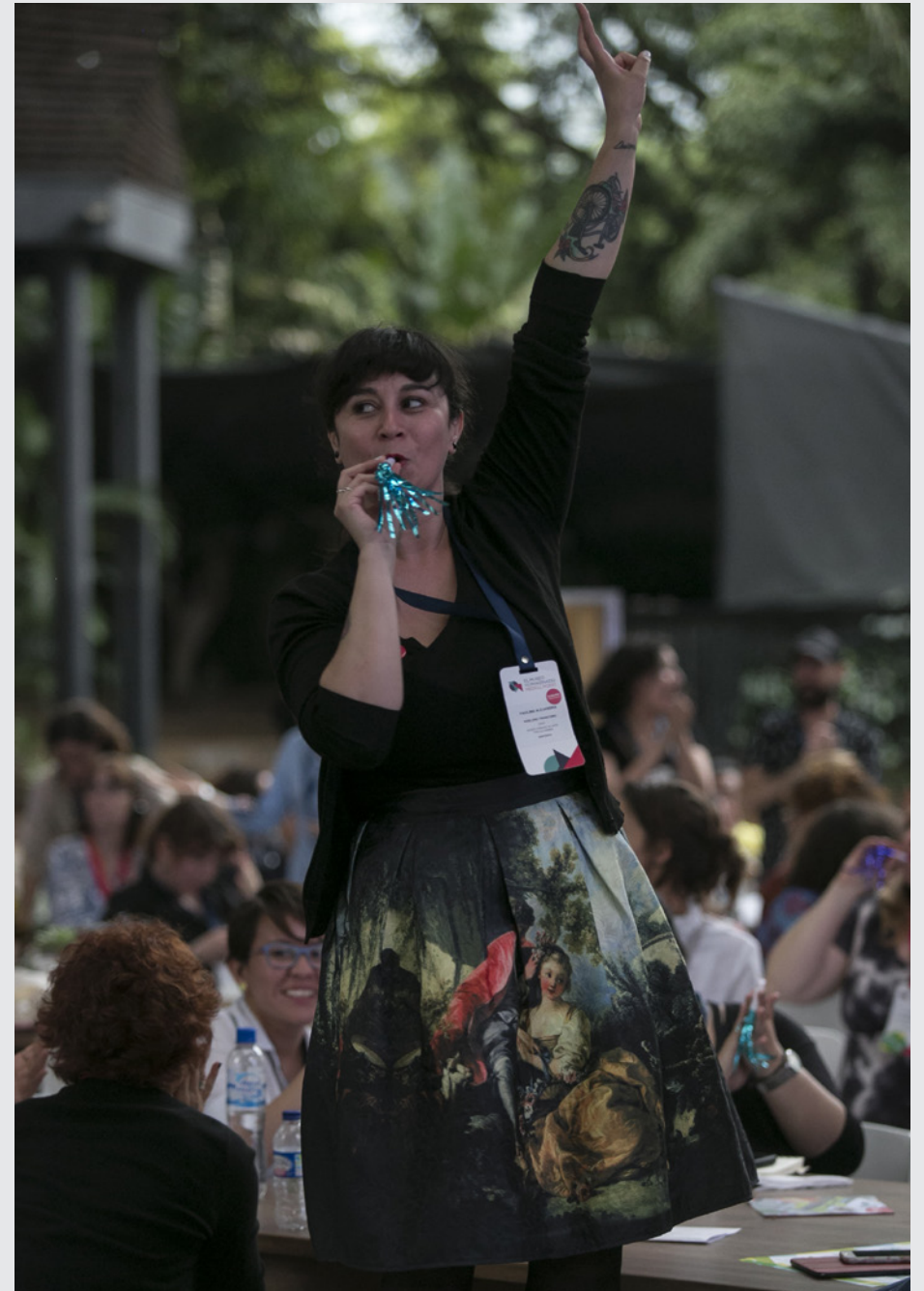
**#Unlearn:**

Rethinking habits and traditions that, although often necessary, can be an obstacle to innovation..

**#PolyphonicMuseums:**

Exploring “otherness” in museum culture, operations, programs, and practices.









## **AAM - American Alliance of Museums**

The world's largest museum service organization, the American Alliance of Museums strengthens museums through leadership, advocacy and collaboration. AAM has been bringing museums together since 1906, helping to develop standards and best practices, offering essential resources and career development and providing advocacy on issues of concern to the entire museum community. AAM represents a membership of over 35,000 institutions & individuals from all 50 U.S. states and nearly 60 countries. The Latino Network of the AAM represents the needs of Latino professionals working in museums and cultural institutions in the United States. The Network offers expertise to U.S. museums on Latino issues and engaging Latino audiences through the development of exhibitions, collections, public programs, and education initiatives. Additionally, it serves as a liaison between the U.S. museum community and Latin American and Caribbean museums, research centers, and cultural institutions and offers guidance to museums across the Americas in their efforts to create partnerships and collaborations.



### Fundación TyPA - Teoría y Práctica de las Artes

The Fundación TyPA has been promoting training and advancement in the areas of the museum, literature and film in Latin America since 2004. It organizes training programs, translates and generates its own publications, creates digital files, provides advice and organizes collaborative networks to support cultural production and its circulation around the world. Over the past 13 years, TyPA has invited experts from leading institutions to participate in its programs with nearly 2000 museum professionals in the region. Some recent programs include meetings on design and public space, creative management, audiences, social inclusion and organizational transformation. The TyPA Lab on Museum Management, created in 2013 to train a new generation of museum leaders in Latin America, is considered to be one of today's most original and effective training programs from which three generations of professionals from seven countries of the region have graduated.



### Parque Explora

Parque Explora is a museum of science and technology, an Amazonian aquarium, a vivarium, a planetarium and a public workshop of experimentation. Located on a former landfill in the northern area of Medellín, Colombia, today it is the largest public space in Medellín dedicated to education and recreation. Parque Explora offers more than 300 interactive activities in its 22,000 square meters of museum space and 15,000 square meters of public space. It has 12 stages, including four exhibition halls, open public space, a children's room, two interconnected auditoriums and an audiovisual production center. Parque Explora promotes the advancement of a society through inclusive knowledge that contributes to human and social development.



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## TEAM

### Fundación TyPA - Teoría y Práctica de las Artes

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General Coordination: Ana van Tuyll  
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González de Langarica  
Programming and Communication: Maia Pérsico  
Administration: Vanesa Vázquez Raimondi

### AAM - American Alliance of Museums

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Officer: Rob Stein  
Senior Director, Integrated Content:  
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Senior Director, Leadership Programs:  
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Senior Manager, Global Partnerships:  
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Latino Network

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Production: Natalia Arcila  
Administration: Daniela Loaiza

## THE PUBLICATION

### July 2018

CC Fundación TyPA - Theory and Practice  
of the Arts and AAM - American Alliance of  
Museums

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Photographs: El Museo Reimaginado 2018  
Copy editor: Mario Valledor  
English translation: Verónica Santos

**Seeing**

Photographs of the event at @ParqueExplora, @AAM and @Fundacion\_TyPA or the hashtag #ElMuseoReimaginado on Twitter and Instagram.

**Listening**

All recordings of Reimagining the Museum 2017 and 2015 can be viewed in English and Spanish at Fundación TyPA's YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/user/FundacionTyPA](http://www.youtube.com/user/FundacionTyPA).

**Reading**

This publication as well as the report on the conclusions of the previous conference are available for free downloading in English and Spanish at [issuu.com/fundacion.tyipa](http://issuu.com/fundacion.tyipa).

Museums have the capacity to reformulate social, cultural and environmental values and can provide options for solving social dilemmas. This publication captures the ideas and thoughts of the speakers of **Reimagining the Museum's** second edition, a conference that brought together more than 600 museum professionals from all the Americas, from November 1 to 3, 2017, in the city of Medellín, Colombia.

During those three days, we shared a common concern about social inequality and, above all, about how that inequality finds its way into museums through language and actions.

We were surprised by the unexpected convergence of the ideas of the speakers, their agile thinking, determination to translate ideas into action, and willingness to face complex challenges as an integral part of the museum's mission.

All of the sessions have been recorded and subtitled, and are available on TyPA's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/FundacionTyPA>. This publication includes excerpts from those sessions, capturing their core concepts.

