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CultureWork

CultureWork: A Periodic *Broadside* for Arts and Culture Workers

CultureWork is an electronic publication of the University of Oregon Center for Community Arts and Cultural Policy. Its mission is to provide timely workplace-oriented information on culture, the arts, education, policy, and community.

ISSN 1541-938X



Current Issue Includes:

February 2006. Vol. 10, No. 1.

From Concept to Creation: A Museum Makeover with Big Ideas and a Small Donor Base

Patricia Krier and Thomas Connolly

The Museum's Community Role

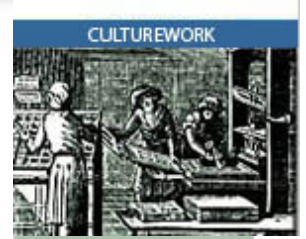
Alice Parman

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Salutations!

Welcome to the Winter 2006 issue of CultureWork. This issue focuses on the cultural sector of museums and features two articles by professionals who have been involved in museums for over twenty years.

We deem that both articles will give readers an excellent introduction to the practical aspects of museum renovation, community interaction, and change. As we move into the 21st century, museums, of all sizes, are redefining their missions and roles within societies as new ideals of global economics, technological change, and cultural interactions are developed. The authors in this issue explore some of the larger questions surrounding the museum community in today's changing world. Additionally, they bring to the table their personal connections and experiences, exploring the ways change can happen with limited time, staff, and budgets.



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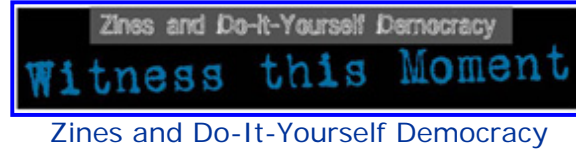
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Regards,

Julie Voelker-Morris
Robert Voelker-Morris
Editors

Special Topic: Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy



Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy represents the explorations of the students and faculty associated with the Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy freshman seminar at the University of Oregon. This exhibit features examples of zines created by zinesters from around the United States as well as by students in the seminar. This exhibit is an online interpretation of a Spring 2005 University of Oregon Knight Library exhibit of the same title.

Curators:
Doug Blandy
Robert Voelker-Morris

CultureWork seeks submissions of concise (500-1500 words) critiques and advisories on community arts and the preparation of community arts workers. Graphics that express the spirit of community arts are welcome, to be published with attribution. Manuscripts should be sent via email as an attachment (as either .doc Word format or .txt plain text format), or can be sent via postal mail on zip disk, CD-R, or DVD-R. Use American Psychological Association guidelines for style and citations. If accepted for publication, authors may be asked to make revisions.

Send submissions to culturwk@uoregon.edu or via postal mail: care of Arts & Administration Program, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403

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Current Issue

Current Issue Includes:

This issue of Culturework features two articles focusing on the cultural venues of museums:

Patricia Krier, Director of Public Programs, and Thomas Connolly, Director of Research, discuss their experiences during the development and completion of an exhibit space renovation at the University of Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History.

Alice Parman, interpretive planner and organizational consultant, discusses and outlines the role of the museum within its immediate community.

February 2006. Vol. 10, No. 1.

[From Concept to Creation: A Museum Makeover with Big Ideas and a Small Donor Base](#)
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[The Museum's Community Role](#)
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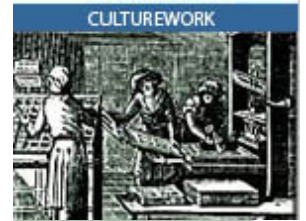
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From Concept to Creation: A Museum Makeover with Big Ideas and a Small Donor Base

[Patricia Krier and Thomas Connolly](#)



Museum of Natural and Cultural History, University of Oregon
2005, Photograph by Jack Liu

Introduction

In 1998 the University of Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History (MNCH) <http://natural-history.uoregon.edu/> embarked on a makeover journey, the first phase of which would last almost eight years. The museum itself, built in 1987, was designed with features reminiscent of a traditional Pacific Northwest American Indian longhouse. The

modest funds available at the time required the exhibit space to be equipped with recycled display furniture, the TV-like cases from the old museum that recalled a 1950s-era when Luther Cressman, Oregon's first archaeologist and first UO anthropology professor, was director. Although a north wing was later added when administrative space was needed, the public area was in desperate need of modernization. After living with it for over a decade, the staff felt that spatial needs should be reassessed. With minuscule funding and only one full-time exhibits coordinator, hands were tied. By 1998 the interior of the museum needed a major makeover!

Hired Expertise: Our first step was to select a facilitator to help us articulate goals and core values, to write up a preliminary interpretive plan, and to ultimately host user groups and stakeholders for their input. A previous director of the museum and exhibit consultant was the person we identified for this important role. We had worked with her over the years and knew she had both the content knowledge and the technical expertise to create a plan for MNCH.

Next, we hired a local architectural firm to develop a conceptual design plan for building changes, including expansion of the building to the south and west. The UO Facility Services, MNCH staff, and the architects created an exceptional design. However after a small feasibility study we faced the reality that the building expansion plan was too grand for our budget and donor base. We then turned our focus to an exhibit space remodel within the existing walls.

Internal Expertise: Thus began the internal staff quest, led by our exhibits coordinator and the university Facilities Services architect, to reconfigure the internal space of the museum. Others began the fundraising process for the exhibit area, working from a vision plan developed by the director.

In order to optimize exhibit space within the existing structure, the museum store was moved to a more central location that traded under-used lobby space for a much-needed multipurpose education and conference room. Administrative workspaces were all relocated in the north wing. Graduate students drafted the designs, and the remodeling work was contracted to a local master craftsman.

Exhibits Makeover

By 2002, the museum was ready to tackle the actual exhibit space renovation, thematically and physically. The goals were:

- to further the science-supported knowledge of Oregon's geologic, biotic, and cultural history.
- to tell the best stories, from multiple viewpoints, in a way that was accessible to lay

audiences.



Previous Exhibit Hall, 2002, Photograph by Robert Voelker-Morris



Museum Interior Dismantling 2003, Photographs by Robert Voelker-Morris



New Exhibit Hall, 2005, Photographs by Jack Liu

Timeline: For the first couple years the staff worked on their own time, fitting projects in as they could while completing their regular daily, weekly and monthly jobs. However, when the production of the exhibits area renovation began in earnest, they were on a very strict contract-dictated time schedule. It was at this time that the small museum core group was created, with one representative from each museum division (collections, research, public programs), an internal project coordinator (exhibits coordinator), and the executive director who was also a professional archaeologist. This group worked with the exhibit design firm but were the final decision makers when it came to primary sources for stories and writing the final text and label copy

University Expertise and Protection: A binding legal contract with an outside firm was developed by university lawyers and the UO Facilities Services architect, and confirmed by the State Department of Justice, in order to protect the museum during every phase of the project.

Changes: The initial design firm, who helped us to develop the conceptual plan for the new exhibit, was a small outfit with good ideas and a lot of energy, but as we moved into the project we learned how complex implementation (construction phase), could be.

Ultimately, we felt more comfortable with a firm that had large-scale implementation experience. We chose a local firm; one we felt was more skilled in the kinds of production needed. As the production process became more than originally anticipated (including installation of a complex heating-ventilation-air conditioning system to insure a climate controlled environment for collections), we were very glad they were close by, both in terms of the need for ongoing consultation and savings in travel costs.

Implementation of the design concept by the new firm required that we repeat some of the conceptual design steps we had already been through. This was an unavoidable necessity (and expense), but it was imperative for the museum's core group and our new partners to share a common vision.

It was a long way from exhibit concept to implementation, and dealing with details (story lines, label copy, and artifact selection, as well as design, hardware, and materials choices) was by far the most time-intensive part of the process. The core group met on a weekly basis, over a period of twelve months typically for four or more hours at a time. This was the most challenging part of the process, due to the fact that the core group members all had full-time management duties outside of this responsibility.

During this process, one member of the museum core group functioned as the primary contact between the museum and the exhibit design firm. This eliminated the transmission of mixed messages in either direction that might result in misunderstandings of needs, instructions, or priorities.

Conclusion

In the end, we were very satisfied with the both the result and the experience we had with the design/construction phase exhibit firm. Of course, there were things we got right, and things we got wrong:

Things we got wrong:

- During the conceptual design phase, we made an attempt to recycle materials from a museum that had created dioramas of the kind we wanted to replicate. Since this organization had recently closed and was selling them off, we anticipated a significant cost savings. As it turned out only a small portion of the materials were used, but the cost of recovery, transport, storage, cleaning, and reconditioning (in excess of \$50,000, the total exhibition budget being one million) outweighed the positives of this well-intentioned misstep. In the end most of the recovered materials could not be used.
- Changing design firms was ultimately the right decision, but it was also costly.

Things we got right:

- Our core group included one person representing each of several critical departments/interests (collections, research, exhibits, public programs). Although conventional wisdom suggests that the diverse interests of this group could be a recipe for conflict, it proved to be the opposite. Among us we had over 100 years of museum experience and were all accustomed to management-level decision-making. This made the process more efficient, as decisions could be made without having to seek outside expertise or approval. The core group not only brought a lot of expertise to the table, but an appreciation for the art of profitable collaboration and judicious compromise.
- Although it proved to be a considerable time burden for the members, the small size of the core group of five senior staff was an advantage. It gave us a focused point of reference for critical questions such as handling of artifacts, public policy, and research. Although different focus groups, tribal representatives, and content experts reviewed design drafts and label copy, the committee made all final decisions on copy and content. We discovered that input from different groups was essential, but could also be contradictory. Having a small group hearing all input insured that valuable input wouldn't be lost, or that contradiction wouldn't be missed.
- Although a small core of senior staff worked well for us in making final decisions, in the end it was a larger group effort including the design firm, all museum internal staff (paid and volunteer), tribal representatives and the many community people that participated. The varied expertise was critical. The key is to find an optimum size that works; enough people to adequately share the burden, but no more than is absolutely essential.

The exhibit opened to great fanfare in February 2005, and our generous donors have paid off the entire project! Now, we're onto the next change, as museums must always be evolving in order to remain cutting-edge educational institutions. UO MNCH has recently received 2.5 million dollars from the Federal Highway Transportation Committee, thanks to Oregon Representative Peter DeFazio, which will be the base for a new, much-needed, curation storage and research facility.

It hardly leaves us with the time, in the midst of all this activity, to be working on the next ten-year vision/strategic plan. But we are. A well-laid plan, with built-in flexibility, is the very foundation of an institution.

Patricia Krier is Director of Public Programs for the University of Oregon Museum of Natural & Cultural History. She has Master's degrees in Italian and French language and literature (1972) and U. S. History (1984) from the UO. She has been with the museum since 1978, and at her current position since 2000.

Thomas Connolly is Director of Research for the University of Oregon Museum of Natural & Cultural History/State Museum of Anthropology, a position held since 1986 when he completed his Ph.D. in anthropology at the UO. Tom's research focuses on the archaeology of the Pacific Northwest.

Patty and Tom have been married for 24 years (they met as graduate students at the museum), and have an 18 year old daughter, Bridey Jean.



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The Museum's Community Role

[Alice Parman](#)

Architects have often proclaimed the unassailable timelessness of museums as keepers of the past. Yet museums are themselves part of history; they are living institutions that must continually cope with the present and imagine how to prepare for the future. Huge changes have been underway for several decades in schools, workplaces, and homes. The Internet and cell phones are transforming how people communicate and learn. What threats and opportunities do these trends present for museums?

The steady proliferation of new devices that purport to bring people closer has set up centrifugal forces that fling us ever outward into isolation. Destructive of family, community, and place-based meaning, a market-driven socio-cultural machine devours the natural worlds of nature and of traditional cultures, heedless of history's cautionary tales.

Individuals, families, and affinity groups seek countervailing, centripetal experiences that draw us together: gathering, meeting, socializing, playing, learning, celebrating, talking, looking for meaning, hoping to belong. Despite the ubiquity of personal computers, people continue to read books; book groups are burgeoning, and library visits and circulation increased steadily throughout the 1990s (American Library Association). Soccer, softball, ultimate Frisbee, and other amateur sports leagues draw participants of all ages (Microsoft Encarta, 2005; Fletcher, 1999).

Like libraries and Ultimate Frisbee, museums have an informal, amateur quality that makes them potential gathering places for their communities. A small-town museum draws a cross-section of local residents to its Community Conversations. A museum in a large, multicultural city invites artists from diverse cultural backgrounds to plan and install exhibits in a Community Gallery. A museum in one of the world's largest cities opens its doors and programs to the extremely diverse immigrant population that lives and works in its own neighborhood. Although they are educational institutions, museums don't set entry requirements, ask visitors to follow a curriculum, or grade them on their efforts. Once visitors have paid the admission fee, they're free to learn in their own way.

Yet museums vary in their ability to attract a cross-section of community members. A key factor is the museum's self-defined role within the community, which may be consciously chosen and maintained, or unconscious and unexamined. Where does each of your community's museums fit in?

Diagnosing the Museum's Community Role

Here's a diagnostic tool for evaluating a particular museum's community role. Remember: a museum can play more than one role. Also, you may think of additional roles that describe an institution you're familiar with. Review each description as it might apply to the museum today. Check the descriptions that you think best match how your community *now* views the museum. Rank order each description on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=perfect match; 5=not at all like us). Add categories and descriptions that better define the institution. Make this worksheet your own.

Community Role of [museum's name]

_____ Visitor attraction

The museum is the "front porch" of the community, welcoming visitors and giving them an overview of what's special and unique about this place.

_____ Catalyst for change

The museum exists to deliver a message that will encourage people to think differently about their relationship to others or to the world.

_____ Center of creativity

The museum engages visitors in activities where they make and do things. Visitors, rather than the museum, determine the outcomes.

_____Memory bank

The museum displays aspects of the history of a place, person, cultural tradition, etc.

_____Storyteller

The museum interprets the history of a place, person, cultural tradition, etc. in ways that relate the past to the present--and even to the future.

_____Attic

The museum preserves objects and images that would otherwise have been discarded.

_____Treasure trove

The museum preserves valuable, meaningful, and/or rare and unusual objects and images.

_____Shrine/hall of fame

The museum honors a particular group or individual and assumes visitors have a built-in interest in this topic.

_____Exclusive club

Although open to the public, the museum is primarily aimed at people with special interests in and knowledge of the topic.

Staying Alive

Whatever the museum's role, staying alive isn't easy, in today's economically unpredictable environment world.

The challenges aren't that different for people and institutions: be yourself, yet somehow manage to fit in. To be yourself means to figure out who you are and who you want to be, as an institution. To fit in means to understand how your institution, with its unique identity, can relate most effectively to your community. If institutional leadership opts for business as usual, or tries to please everyone, the result is unlikely to be successful. The museum may be viewed as old hat, stuck in the mud; or chameleon-like, a sellout. But museum leaders who view these challenges dynamically find built-in mechanisms for successful adaptation:

Be yourself = Figure out who you are and who you want to be.

Focus on your mission and vision.

Develop organizational and interpretive goals.

Fit in = Understand your community.

Build an active, broadly representative board.

Make evaluation a priority.

Through strategic and interpretive planning, museums can discover how to make a unique contribution and play a valued community role. This process has been going on for more than a century as noted in Anderson's (2004) invaluable historical survey *Reinventing the Museum*.

Among museums that have successfully met these challenges, becoming and remaining themselves and fitting in to their communities in marvelous ways, three examples stand out for me. Seattle's Wing Luke Asian Museum (www.wingluke.org) sets an international standard for community-based exhibits and programs. The Pratt Museum (www.prattmuseum.org) in Homer, Alaska is noted for its work with Native people and other community members, its use of low-cost technology to produce a wealth of accessible media, and its focus on interpretation and preservation of Kachemak Bay. Manhattan's Tenement Museum (www.tenement.org) offers memorable programs interpreting a unique historic site, while serving diverse immigrant communities in its own neighborhood and throughout the city.

What do these projects have in common?

Each is grounded in a place and a community (*Fit In*).

Exhibits and programs are small-scale and low-cost (*Be Yourself*).

Goals and execution are characterized by imagination, creativity, and quality (*Be Yourself*).

Change is step-by-step, incremental, goal-directed--and may take *years* (*Be Yourself*).

The ensemble is attractive and rewarding for locals and tourists alike (*Fit In*).

Big projects can be successful, but many are destined to fail. Overbuilding can be dangerous. Too many museums open with big debts and unrealistic admission projections.

Within the last 10 to 15 years, several much-ballyhooed regional attractions have opened and closed within a year or two (e.g. Denver's Ocean Journey aquarium and the Bellevue, Washington Art Museum). "Build it and they will come" may come true in the movies, but in the real world of museums it has proved to be mostly a fairy tale.

Yet some startup and re-invented museums and other cultural attractions are thriving. In Oregon, the Columbia River Maritime Museum (www.cmmm.org) has made big gains in admissions, membership, audience diversity, and store sales following the renovation of its visitor services and Great Hall exhibits. (Notably, that project was scaled back after a feasibility study clarified the scope of funding that could reasonably be expected.) A consortium of museums and other heritage organizations is just beginning to market Oregon City as a destination for history buffs. Careful planning, expert consultation, and a unique configuration of historic properties bode well for this ambitious effort.

Checking Your Vital Signs

If you are contemplating a change in your museum's role, assess your situation before you commit for the long haul. What are the ingredients of a successful startup or re-invention project? These are the vital signs that will help you stay alive and accomplish your goals:

Vision. A key person serves as the driving force, whether visibly or behind the scenes. A personable style, openness to collaboration, and boundless energy will help attract the support of colleagues and community leaders, as well as significant donations.

A committed board. Project planning and implementation takes an extraordinary amount of time and effort. Problems will inevitably arise. Strong support from board members is indispensable. The board should be prepared to make extraordinary contributions of time and funds, setting a leadership standard for volunteers and community supporters.

Community support. How will your project benefit a variety of constituencies and stakeholders? What unique contribution will the museum make to people's lives? What key institutional partners are in your corner? Critical masses of people have to understand and support your project--or it won't be sustainable.

Seed money. This can be raised from a variety of sources. Foundations and business leaders, board members and volunteers are likely prospects who may want to get in on the ground floor. You can go back to many of the same sources later for implementation funding.

Persistence. New ideas are often controversial. Successful projects build on past efforts, emulating their strengths and learning from their mistakes. An inclusive, open planning process is essential. To succeed, an interpretive project must ally itself in a mutually

respectful way with other community-building efforts, creating a special role that fits the hopes, expectations, and needs of a broad cross-section of citizens and organizations.

Expertise. You'll need qualified professionals such as an architect, exhibit designer, fundraising consultant, graphic artist, etc. Many consultants are willing to do a certain amount of pro bono work and this gives you an opportunity to try on a working relationship. Check with colleagues in your region for recommendations. Once you've established a scope of work, ask for formal submissions of qualifications and firm quotes. Choosing the appropriate consultants is critical to the achievement of your project goals. Look for experience that fits your subject matter and scope.

Conclusion: A New Community Focus

As you move forward, evaluate your plans and progress in light of your chosen community role. Each time you make a difficult decision, remember that as an institution, you need to be yourself and fit in. Your role in the community will be defined and strengthened not only by the project outcome, but also by the quality of your planning process.

Nationwide, community-focused museums are making a difference for people of all ages and backgrounds. Exhibits and programs invite visitors and members to explore common interests and engage in dialogue about current issues. And as community members gain confidence in the museum as a safe space where all viewpoints are welcome, there is potential for fruitful conversations on controversial and divisive topics as well.

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With a background as a high school teacher and a Ph.D. in Education, Alice Parman began her museum career as educator and administrator at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History. After a 15-year career as a museum educator and director, since 1989 she has worked as an interpretive planner and organizational consultant for a variety of nonprofit clients. More information at <http://www.aparman.com>.



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Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy

Witness this Moment

-CultureWork-

Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy

Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy represents the explorations of the students and faculty associated with the *Zines and Do-It-Yourself Democracy* freshman seminar at the University of Oregon. This exhibit features examples of zines created by zinesters from around the United States as well as by students in the seminar. This exhibit is an online interpretation of a Spring 2005 University of Oregon Knight Library exhibit of the same title. (Read about the [Curatorial Method](#) here, this link opens in a new browser window.)

Zines are not about canonization, but about the possibility of universal participation. Our purpose is not to present an encyclopedic tour of the genre, but instead a response to questions such as:

- How do zines function in a corporate controlled media environment?
- What is the larger context in which zines are created and distributed?
- What is the history of zines?
- What is the effect of zines on people, culture, and society?
- We hope that this exhibit will motivate you to explore the large and diverse world of zines.



Left: Cometbus #26
Right: rrrl girlz v. 3 #1

Zines. There is no consensus on how to define a zine. To witness the evolving process of defining zines visit the Wikipedia definition of zines at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zines>. Generally, zines can be understood as independently produced, independently circulated, non-copyrighted, self-funded, limited edition pamphlet/magazine-like publications.

Do-It-Yourself (DIY). George McKay in *Party and Protest in Nineties Britain* sums up DIY best as "a combination of inspiring action, narcissism, youthful arrogance, principle, ahistoricism, idealism, indulgence, reactivity, plagiarism, as well as the rejection and embracing alike of technological innovation."

Democracy. Douglas Lummis, in his book *Radical Democracy*, argues that democracy is more than a set of institutions or a "system." Democracy is a state of being and doing. Democracy is a performance. Zines, as spaces for communicating about issues of public and private concern are doing democracy.

"Think! Think! It ain't illegal, yet!!" reads the first page of U Don't Stop, a zine I picked up the other day.

It's not an unusual request. Zines (short for fanzines, derived from magazines) are homemade pamphlets with a rebellious mission: to create an independent voice outside the mainstream. Though one could trace their roots back to the political pamphlets of the American Revolution, zines as a distinct medium were born in the 1930s. It was then that fans of science fiction, often through the clubs they formed, started producing fanzines as a way of sharing stories and ideas about a literary genre sniffed at by the cultural establishment. Forty years later, in the mid 1970s, fans of punk rock music, ignored by and critical of the commercial music press, also began publishing zines about their cultural scene. In the early 1980s these two tributaries converged with smaller streams of publications by fans of other cultural strains, as well as the remnants of printed political dissent from the 1960s, and a genuine media subculture came of age. Today, somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 different zines circulate throughout the United States and the world. What binds all these publications together is a common prime directive: DIY (Do-It-Yourself). Stop shopping for culture and go out and create your own. (Duncombe, 1999)

Best Viewed by listening to the "[Democracy Mix](#)"!

(this link opens in a new browser window)

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[zinesters](#)



Portland zine symposium 2005

<http://www.pdxzines.com/>

Acknowledgements

Maria Finison, Don Stacy, Owen Smith, and Dan Beyer

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