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### Learning Through Social Media: A Case Study of the Getty Center

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SOCIAL MEDIA: GETTY

**Learning Through Social Media: A Case Study of the Getty Center**

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate Program of the Department of Art and Design at the University at Kearney

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in Education

Major: Art Education

Under the Supervision of Dr. Ross H. Schlemmer

By

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December 11, 2022

**Abstract**

Social media is a powerful tool that allows for massive connectivity across the globe and is integral to how young people interact with each other and make sense of their world. During the COVID19 pandemic of 2020, social media was instrumental in connecting communities to museums and providing access during closures. This case study examines how The Getty Center in Los Angeles utilized social media with innovative, strategic thinking and engaging content to achieve their mission of educating the public and increasing awareness about the artifacts housed in their collection.

*Keywords:* museum, social media, education

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## Learning Through Social Media: A Case Study of the Getty Center

### Chapter 1

#### Introduction

This study focuses on how museums leverage social media to educate and engage their audience. *Social media* is a powerful tool that allows for massive connectivity across the globe and is integral to how young people interact with each other and make sense of their world. During the COVID19 pandemic of 2020, social media was instrumental in connecting communities to museums and providing access during closures.

Social media, as a blanket term, means many things to many individuals and entities, and is largely determined by age group. Social media is defined as “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). As an avid social media user and a former elementary school teacher for 23 years, I was well aware that 21<sup>st</sup> century learning required knowledge of technology and how best to leverage it with students and integrate their use within the classroom effectively. Social media facilitates communication and provides a base for creativity while also paving the way for the need for increased critical thinking. This led to my following the latest trends in technology, its possibilities while also considering the pitfalls. As I began studying museum education, I became fascinated with how museums were leveraging these platforms to engage their audiences. At first, I was merely interested in the number of followers a museum had, but as I began to dig deeper, there were an array of other issues concerning social media within a museum such as accessibility, visual and participatory culture, audience engagement, and content production which all interact and overlap with differing methods or strategy.

In the wake of the COVID19 pandemic, museums faced closures globally. Shutting down and staying at home gave rise to challenges and new opportunities for museums. If they were to continue with their mission, they needed to innovate. In March of 2020, Matthew Kobach, current Chief Marketing Officer of Northbeam and former head of social media for the New York Stock Exchange said in a tweet, “We’re about to see a boom in live social media broadcasts: Concerts, workout classes, stand-up comedy. Broadway, museum tours... this period will forever change the way we create and consume social media” (Kobach, 2020). Not only were museums going to need to innovate, but those innovations were going to be based on behavior and ways we as the public consumed social media content.

The purpose of this case study is to explore how The Getty Museum uses social media platforms to engage the local community with their collection, broaden their audience, and encourage further learning opportunities. Located in Los Angeles, California, The J. Paul Getty Museum’s mission “seeks to inspire curiosity about, and enjoyment and understanding of, the visual arts” (Getty, n.d.) and in that spirit, the profiles of all social media connected to the museum succinctly summarize their purpose with the statement: “Bringing people together through art. Based in Los Angeles, working globally” (Getty, n.d.). Innovations that occurred during this period of shut down can only further enhance the reach of museums as they look to expand their educational opportunities and access to their collections:

- What technology innovations did the Getty implement as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic of 2020? How did it change their strategy?
- How did The Getty leverage social media to engage their audiences? How was their response unique?

- How did audiences respond and interact with the social media content produced by The Getty?
- What criteria was used by The Getty to assess the effectiveness of their use of social media?

The questions of how a particular museum utilized social media to educate and engage the community and what makes their content unique began to have larger implications. A museum would need strong evaluation tools to gauge whether their content and strategies were indeed serving the public. This case study looks at The Getty closely to see how their social media strategy and innovative and engaging content achieves the desired objectives of the institution and fulfills their mission. Further knowledge regarding social media within a museum space allows for a reorchestration where museums, transitioning from a transmission model (what we want to impart) to a user perspective (what people may want to know), can “begin to find new answers to what they want to communicate, how and to whom they communicate, where and when their communication takes place, and importantly for what ends” (Drotner & Schrøder, 2013, p. 3).

## Chapter 2

### Methods

#### Study Overview

This case study provides a qualitative inquiry focusing on The Getty Center in Los Angeles, looking to gain understanding and insight into museum best practices utilizing social media to educate and engage. This case study examines the period from March to May to see how social media was enacted during this specific window of time.

A *case study* can be viewed as a methodology or a type of research design in qualitative research that investigates real-life, contemporary bounded systems through data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thomas (2017) states, that “the aim is to gain a rich, detailed understanding by examining aspects of the case in detail” (p. 156). Although not meant to be generalizable, studying this case to understand it in greater detail illuminates a theoretical point (Thomas, 2017). In art education, case studies have been used to examine topics ranging from museum education, classroom interactions, to cultural policy in practice and their specificity allows them to “reflect broader human concerns and make it relatable to a broader audience” (Miraglia & Smilian, 2014, p. 58). By examining the social media campaign of the Getty Museum Challenge in great detail, the case study methodology allows for an exploration of the current conversation revolving around the shifting role of museums in an ever-evolving world of digital technology and virtual space.

#### Boundaries of the Case

This case study focuses on The Getty Center and analyzes their use of social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) during Spring 2020, and specifically the art



recreation challenge [#gettymuseumchallenge, etc.]. A coherent and effective social media strategy not only has the ability to effectively achieve a museum's mission of engaging and educating the public, but also has the potential of increasing donor funding and revenue with successful achievement of institutional objectives. Although I live in Los Angeles where the Getty is located, my research includes observations based on online comments and discussions among social media managers and educators. In addition, I engaged in a remote analysis of actual UGC (User Generated Content), numerical data and social media analytics.

### **Data Collection Tools**

This case study primarily involved an examination based on discussions among museum educators and social media professionals collected through blogs, articles, interviews, webinars, and press articles, to determine strategy, content creation, and the effectiveness of each. I conducted an analysis of actual User Generated Content (UGC) and responses on social media and comments regarding each to determine overall efficacy and audience engagement. Also, I used my own observations which included my personal reflections and impressions regarding the use of social media and how it achieved stated goals. All conversations analyzed were published on public forums.

**Figure 2.2**

*Outline of data collection tools, purposes, and sources of the data*

TOOLS	PURPOSE	SOURCE OF DATA
DOCUMENT ANALYSIS *Webinars *Newspaper / Internet Articles *Blogs *Notes	To understand how participants have carried out coherent and effective social media strategies and produced engaging content  Used to establish and inform the social, historical, and contextual aspects of the study referenced by this researcher	PRIMARY SOURCES *Articles, Webinars, Blogs, Interviews, UGC SECONDARY SOURCES *Newspaper and internet articles, webinars *Notes on webinar, articles, etc.
SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS *Social Media *User Generated Content *Notes	To analyze effectiveness of social media strategies and use of platform	PRIMARY SOURCES *UGC, posts, emails, etc. *My personal reflections and impressions *Trending topics *Noting increase in followers, etc.

### **Limitations to the Study**

The Getty Museum Challenge is one social media campaign from one museum and by conducting this research, the findings are limited to this case. Although characteristics and qualities regarding the outcomes, experiences, and response to the challenge may be reflected in the literature and illustrate best practices, the circumstances surrounding the pandemic were and still are unprecedented and thus consideration needs to be made for those factors. The findings based on these analyses and observations are subjective and thus open to personal bias.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Literature Review**

Summarizing the essence of the works of John Dewey, Hein (2012) states that “education remains the key to learning about life and to interpreting and understanding our experience, and thus the essential activity of humans propagating our culture” (p. 19). With education being central to their purpose, how do museums fit into a new digital era of advancing technology and worldwide interconnectivity through virtual platforms? This chapter attempts to connect and contextualize topics within museum education, technology in art education, and social media within the museum space including current and evolving best practices.

### **Museum Education: An Overview**

Trends within museum education, as with public education, seem to swing and follow the path of a pendulum. Public education after the Progressive Era of Dewey has seen more student-centered curriculum and practice, but even in recent history we have shifted through “whole language” to “back to basics” through No Child Left Behind and now Common Core. Museums seem to have followed the same path as they continue to navigate their place within their communities and shift to societal needs. And although museum education has been an integral function of art museums in America since their inception, many significant questions regarding what that education looks like had remained unresolved (Dobbs and Eisner, 1987). These questions become increasingly challenging within a new landscape of global interconnectivity and as digital technologies such as social media continue to shape and reframe the museum/audience relationship.

Museums began as temples organized around the beauty of objects which gave rise to formalism as a way to objectively appreciate art. The early 20<sup>th</sup> Century museums saw as their

goal to improve society which focused on delivering correct information about museum objects and philosophies (Buffington, 2007). With more volunteers and a focus on imagination, creativity, and enthusiasm, museums began to see a shift where the experience of discovery became key to learning, emphasizing enjoyment and engagement over formal lectures. This breakdown of the more structured teacher-student relationship allowed for a more equal participation of learners that favored dialogue. Kai-Kee (2011) references the “ivory tower and the discotheque” debate in the 60’s and 70’s where the “Credo for Museum Education” at the time stated museums were obliged to serve “the broadest portion of society within its capabilities” (p. 34). Museums had been plagued with the constraints of formality while still trying to assert their position as ambassadors of the arts to their communities.

While responding to activism at the time and looking to broaden the arts and its scope of outreach, what transpired was a sort of an exhaustion and museum education found itself in what Dobbs and Eisner (1987) refer to as an “uncertain profession.” In attempting to be everything to everybody, many critics found art education and museums in a place that lacked purpose and firm grounding, thus encouraging a “back to basics” approach. We have seen this in Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) curriculum which, now due to its constraints, has looked to balance more student inquiry and discovery in Universal by Design (UbD) curriculums.

As a current museum professional and educator, it was somewhat disheartening to read how Dobbs and Eisner (1987) describe museum education as “a stepchild discipline” with “unarticulated basic aims, little political clout, low status in the museum, and a very short career ladder” (p. 81-82). This of course was not their own opinion, but a description of the state of the field, which I think also parallels society’s views of public education in general, one of perceived value, but in reality, diminished in voice and importance. Looking forward, with education being

central to the mission of museums, it is the hope that museum educators can build on experiences of teachers and artists to engage the public with both factual knowledge and understanding of artistic objects in context, being responsive to their audiences and mindful of diversity and inclusion.

One trend that has proven crucial for the museums' future is technology and its role in engagement and education. The pandemic of 2020-2021 pushed museums to innovate in order to stay relevant and serve their communities without the possibility of opening their buildings safely. As museums move forward, those that continue to sustain these innovations in tandem with strong outreach programs in collaboration with school partners and teachers will be the most successful. Buffington (2007) speaks about these 'emerging technologies' where social media platforms along with online remote learning, virtual tours, blogs, podcasts, and user-generated content all play a vital role in audience engagement and the future of museum education.

In exploring various learning theories related to museum education, I was drawn to David Ebitz (2007) as he spoke about his own experience "as a bridge between the viewer and the object" and how the role of museum educator saw a "shift of attention from collections to the visitors they serve" (p. 21). Museum collections are just that, a collection, but what makes them culturally relevant and significant to their audience is how the visitor and audience in general interact with the collection. This provides a framework for the museum educator in that making meaning, visitor experience, and democratization and equal access can be leading principles for engagement and continuing conversations regarding their collections.

When presented with an artwork, the viewer begins to interpret meaning which is personal and can be seen through a variety of lenses. Interpreting works of art is now viewed as a

sociopolitical practice that occurs in the context of culture where “visitors become active builders of personally relevant meaning” (Mayer, 2007, p. 43). This suggests that the museum educator’s role is less about imparting the “correct” interpretation but providing access to resources necessary for informed and purposeful integration as they construct meaning and make connections. This makes sense when thinking about Dewey (1938/1970) and his assertion that “the starting point for experience-based education is always the complex body of knowledge, insights and personal experience that each learner brings to the educational arena” (Longhenry, 2007, p. 183).

Further exploration of the visitor experience can give us more insight into how better to equip art museum educators more effectively. Longhenry (2007) discusses how art museums struggle with the idea of being an educational institution by not engaging with the important question of what meaningful opportunities are unique to art museums. A visitor, as a student in the classroom, is more motivated to learn when the environment and experience is engaging. Longhenry (2007) talks about how ‘learning’ has a negative connotation, but when is presented as self-directed or voluntary it is more attractive, which makes communication integral to how that experience will be defined by the visitor. Rose (2007) discusses Beer’s (1987/1992) comparison of museum and school curriculum, which I found interesting in that I don’t see the goals of enjoyment and appreciation antithetical to teachers in schools. As teachers, we structure our classrooms for a conducive learning environment where the learner feels respected and intrinsically motivated with engaging lessons with high interest. This seems important as museums look to provide museum visitors with an optimal experience which would lead to learning that has a meaningful and personal context.

As Reese (2007) explores museum pedagogy, she describes it as a collage, a creative production formed of likely stories. She sums up the idea of the optimal museum experience as being “a dynamic process rather than a static encounter” (p. 243). Growing technologies have a place in prioritizing the experience of a visitor over predetermined and prescriptive programming. According to Katz and Windegardner (2020) “The same level of understanding and engagement that happens through museum tours and programs could happen through digital and analog interpretive experiences, even without an educator present” (p. 30). The museum educator’s role begins to take on the responsibility of designing digital experiences which provide a bridge for the visitor or user rather than didactically imparting information.

Another important issue in museum education is a democratic curriculum that provides for equal access. This is reflected in the American Association for Museums report, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Museums* which highlighted their responsibilities to provide public service and leadership with equal access to museum exhibitions and programs (Rose, 2007). It is important to note here the issues Mayer (2007) discusses about by the feminist critique of the very notion of a canon of artists (Nochlin, 1971/1988) and the institutional racism of art history (Berger, 1992; Harris 2001). As museums work to provide a space for meaning making for a diverse audience, it is important to look at how the objects within a collection represent cultural narratives. Mayer (2007) further states that interpretations of art are products of subjective choices, not the unearthing of objective facts. Rose (2007) explores this dynamic by stating, “Museum educators, who are charged with mediating knowledge from exhibitions to the public, now grapple with how knowledge construction relates to power” (p. 49). Hull and Scott (2013) suggest that museums working digitally to increase access and extend searchability can provide more diverse media for the purpose of authoring and curating. This becomes important

to challenge preordained histories and exclusive systems such as search algorithms, which then enables the formation of new understandings through sharing and re-authoring of artifacts.

When using technology, a museum can increase accessibility and achieve an inclusive approach as it seeks to meet all learners by being mindful of personal identities. Katz and Winegardner (2020), a museum educator and interactive media designer, developed an application called Create, Connect, Contemplate to supplement the exhibition The Columbus Crossing Borders Project which was on view at the Dublin Arts Council in the summer of 2018. As part of a series on *Integration, Immigration, and Identity*, the exhibition contained work from 34 artists which explored the refugee experience and inspired compassion for refugees. The app was tailored to school groups and the article explores how to apply critical theories when developing digital interactives to deepen understanding of art and complex topics. Katz and Winegardner (2020) concluded that “Digital technology grounded in critical multiculturalism presents a paradigm for inclusive engagement in any educational, museum, or social justice setting” (p. 37). Critical multiculturalism drove the digital technology and made the works of art accessible in new ways.

### **Art Education and the Digital World**

There are many opportunities and challenges when it comes to technology and how it relates to art education within the classroom as well as the museum. I have been very interested in these intersections and how as educators when we consider content, pedagogy, and technology we are better prepared to facilitate 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning and can provide more meaningful opportunities for students. As a classroom teacher for 23 years, I have seen the growth of technology within the classroom, not only as tools for students, but for educators, and the most effective are able to leverage their knowledge of these technologies and how they relate to the



content they teach and their pedagogical practice. These issues within the classroom are related to and applicable within the museum education space and educators should be mindful of best practices when it comes to technology.

Students have many opportunities to create and share their work using technology and digital social platforms. Castro (2012) presents his findings of a design-based research study exploring how the dynamics of learning and teaching art shift through social media. Participatory culture specifically in these contexts are asynchronous, dynamic, and reciprocal. This means that learning is not merely defined by the teacher and fixed at a certain point in time, but instead has fluidity and flexibility enabled by two-way communication which empowers the student. Castro designed a curriculum and learning experience with photography that allowed participants to share, comment, and post regarding artworks and images they created, thus building a community that emphasized group knowledge and learning from peers. In Castro's curriculum model, the teacher becomes a co-participant with students and the complex collective knowledge within the system created a space where everyone's local knowledge could interact, thus creating a source of their own curriculum. As peers learn from each other, the identity of the teacher shifts and is reconsidered through social media where learning is not based on one individual.

Papadopoulou (2019) explored the role of digital media and art and how they converge in constructing meaning, developing deep understandings, and emphasizing the 'we' in the use of technology. Digital technology in the arts has transformed viewers into participants and has allowed students to interact with artworks and explore their meanings with projects that combine text, visual imagery, sound, and an interrelated network of thematic issues. Best practices include inquiry and analyzing artwork by students posing questions as well as bringing multimedia literacy into the classroom.

Communication is essential as students meaningfully interact in the digital world with a strong relationship to analog and the real world (Papadopoulou, 2019). Networked identities are constructed and disseminated within a digital visual culture and have a variety of implications for art educational practices (Sweeny, 2009). Hyperlinks, mashups with videos, and simulated immersive environments along with various platforms such as Flickr, YouTube, and Second Life have the potential for educators and students to build connection, community, and increase opportunities for engagement. Community is an important part of *Socially Engaged Art* (SEA) and Helguera (2011) noted an interesting relationship between face-to-face and virtual sociality and posits that “recent forms of SEA are both a response to the interconnectivity of today’s world and the result of a desire to make those connections more direct and less dependent on a virtual interface” (p. 18). As educators, it is important to not only be aware of the implications of technology, but also see how students are constructing meaning as they navigate these platforms to provide the best experiences for students.

### **The Connected Museum**

Museums as institutions have gone through extreme and rapid changes in the era of new digital technologies. Meecham (2013) stated that not only have they transformed the visitor experience by facilitating user generated knowledge and creative opportunities, but by also “enabling greater access to archival information and collections resulting in community building and the widespread dissemination of hidden and repressed histories” (p. 33). Meecham also acknowledges that “many museum professionals and the visiting public remain skeptical, even hostile, to digital applications in the museum, concerned about issues of authenticity, authority, ownership, and truthfulness of representation” (p. 37). The response of museums initially to the vast expanse of the world wide web and its social implications have been relatively conservative

where the “default mode for museums (particularly with high profile strategies online) has in the main, been informational, emphasizing their veracity” (Parry, 2013, p. 22). Thus, museums asserted their position with an online existence characterized as being accurate and authoritative, creating a “matrix of trust” and differentiating themselves with a “highly evidenced, informational and controlled presence” (p. 23).

Social media with its promise of possibility has at times been at odds with principles of protectionism and forces museums to grapple with the two opposing forces as they witness a shift in power from established authority to the visiting public. Ingemann (2013) speaks of this dynamic by saying:

If a museum wishes to involve the users more actively in art experiences and learning, this means giving up some of its authority and making space for the users’ bodily, emotional and knowledge-related competences, which are necessary in order to enable them to express their values and feelings in relation to the museum’s works of art. (p. 202)

According to Kelly (2013), by providing platforms that encourage participatory communication, social media within the museum is transforming the relationships that institutions are having with their constituents. She quotes Heumann Gurian (2010) as saying, “My fundamental assumption is that museums will soon need to shift from being a singular authority to a participant and encourager of intellectual and social engagement among its visitors” (p. 67). Without acknowledging this change, museums run the risk of isolating themselves completely and erasing themselves from the public consciousness altogether, thus abdicating any last remnant of perceived authority.

Kelly (2013) further explores what this changing relationship between museum and audience means for institutional practices as museums exist today not only within the physical site, but also the online world (via websites and social media) and in the mobile space, allowing for a two-way relationship involving greater connection, interaction, and access. She identifies six themes as being key to the transformative museum of the future. Framed as “We” statements, she describes museums as being social, mobile, made up of digital learners whose practice is participatory and sharing, with skills and toolkits combining both traditional and new ways of working and willing to embrace organizational change.

In the attempt to make museums more accessible by facilitating positive experiences, Cooper (2007) emphasized that art museums are no longer isolated institutions, and that museums should work to expand their reach using the Internet as a global network. In the wake of the COVID pandemic, much of the museum industry and ultimately its workforce had been decimated. With the inability to enter the physical space, museums suffered, but were presented with an opportunity for innovation and those who have explored digital platforms and considered leveraging digital technologies more effectively may survive with greater efficacy and vibrancy among their audiences in the future. According to Najda-Jonoszka & Sawczuk (2021), as museums work to become active participants of communities rather than mere representatives by creating virtually co-constructed cultural destinations that complement the physical one, social media becomes less subordinate and efforts in favor of “enhancing cross departmental cooperation to capture and build synergies across virtual and physical spheres of action become indispensable” (p. 606). Museums embracing and utilizing social media expertly along with other mobile technologies, encourage and enable enhanced engagement, sparking conversations

that breathe life into the artifacts held within their collections which extend beyond the walls of the institution.

### **Reflections on Literature Review**

Social media and digital technologies offer a wide range of possibilities when it comes to engagement and its own set of complex challenges, both in the environment it creates affecting the landscape in which museums dwell, but also considering how to effectively implement within an institution which seeks to provide genuine and authentic means for connection. As educators seek to guide meaning making, social media allows for a variety of experiences that extend beyond the building of a museum which encourage participatory learning and co-creation. Museums and their practice continue to grow and change as they adapt and respond to visitor and audience needs with new technologies, innovations, and strategy.

## Chapter 4

### Discussion

#### Introduction

Social media platforms became instrumental in continuing the mission of The Getty as the Coronavirus pandemic caused closure of museum buildings and forced many around the world to remain at home, isolated from others to stay safe. Speaking of the immediate challenges presented by COVID19, Timothy Potts (2020), director of the J. Paul Getty Museum, stated,

This situation has brought one certainty to bear: the importance of robust and universally accessible digital resources, not only for staff, but also for our audiences. Like many institutions, once the two Museum sites (Getty Center and Villa) were closed we focused on increasing our online presence. To guide a digital strategy at this unusual time, we began by taking an audience-first approach—seeing what people were looking for from the Getty and other major cultural institutions at this unusual time. On social media, we emphasized initiatives that were participatory or created ‘conversations,’ with the goal of publishing content that was uplifting, inspirational, and focused on creating community through art. (p. 218)

This focus would put the audience at the center and led to one of their first social media initiatives in the wake of the pandemic, one that would connect and encourage creativity while increasing awareness and accessibility, the Getty Museum Challenge.

The Getty Museum Challenge was modeled after a similar online event posted by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, based on an Instagram account called Tussenkunstenquarantaine which translates to “between art and quarantine”, with the idea of recreating famous and beloved works of art from home. Using Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, the Getty launched their own

challenge on March 25, 2020 (Figure 4.1) with an invitation to use artworks from the Getty's online collection including a link to access their digital library of resources which offers thousands of high-resolution images of art for free. The post contained three easy and manageable steps: choose an artwork, find three items around your house, then use the objects to recreate the artwork. Subsequently, participants were encouraged to use the hashtags: #GettyMuseumChallenge, #tussenkunstenquarantaine, and #betweenartandquarantine when sharing creations across social media platforms.

**Figure 4.1**

*Twitter post introducing challenge*



## Goals and Strategy

The digital team at the Getty “had to stop and rethink what our audiences would need or want from us during this crisis” (Waldorf et al. n.d.) and according to those behind the social media campaign, The Getty Museum Challenge had two clear objectives: 1.) Strengthen engagement with followers 2.) Awareness – of the Getty’s rebranded social media presence and the Open Content program which provides digitized artworks for free (Waldorf et al., n.d.).

Included in the Open Content Program are:

Over 81,000 images of works of art from the Getty Museum’s collection, including Greek and Roman antiquities, illuminated manuscripts, paintings, sculptures, objects of decorative art, and 19th-photographs.

Over 78,000 images of art and archival material from the Getty Research Institute’s collections, including prints, maps, photographs, and study images documenting the history of European art. (Getty, n.d.)

While technology allows for the collection to be accessible to a wide audience on a global scale through the internet, social media facilitates a way for users and ‘visitors’ in the digital space to not only become aware of its existence, but through the challenge are provided a gateway into exploring the artworks contained within the online collection.

Annelisa Stephan, former Assistant Director of Digital Content Strategy and User Experience Design at the Getty, provides insight into this type of thinking and how it impacts social media strategy regarding accessibility. In an interview with Johns Hopkins Museum Studies in 2016 she stated,

One of our goals at the Getty is to make our resource, digital resources more accessible, but that usually tends to stop at making them sort of downloadable or viewable online for



free which is huge and very important, but there's also another piece that needs to happen of that which is making them intellectually and psychologically accessible. (Mitchell, 2016)

This involves scaffolding and providing entry points for people by creating examples, how-tos, or stories which unpack the scholarly material in meaningful ways. In 2020, this foundational thinking is evident and undergirds the Getty Museum Challenge which acts as a bridge, a pathway for people to be introduced to the archive, allowing for exploration in a fun and simple way. Being prompted by the activity, the challenge provides the user at home an opportunity for learning that is experiential, self-directed, and highly motivating.

To maximize engagement and encourage participation from the widest possible audience, the social media campaign strategy involved three components: 1. Low barrier-to-entry 2. Show inspiring and achievable examples, and 3. Multi-channel approach (Waldorf et. al., n.d.). This also meant that while the Getty audiences vary from platform to platform, the achievability of the prompt would resonate and inspire across a range of demographics such as families who were quarantined together. The Getty sought to inspire by showcasing their own examples with links that directly related to the artworks being recreated. (Figure 4.2 and 4.3)

**Figure 4.2**

*Twitter post of recreation of Madonna and Child with link attached*

**Figure 4.3**

*Screenshot of Getty Website Online Resource for Madonna and Child*



As the challenge gained traction and popularity, the Getty wrote a blog post which was shared through the e-newsletter channels and RSS feeds so that new audiences who may not follow the museum on social media might be exposed to the viral phenomenon (Waldorf et al., n.d.). In this reintroduction of the challenge, the simple rules were restated along with many

examples, including recreations of artworks from other museums and links to their online collections. The blog post also provided a variety of helpful tips which encouraged participants to get a pet involved, make a face, or strike a pose, pay attention to lighting, think abstractly, or to use food (Waldorf & Stephan, 2020). Building interaction and community engagement was key and part of that meant letting enthusiasm drive the campaign, allowing for flexibility where not every artwork was of the Getty collection and not every recreation used just 3 objects. Instead, all entries from every experience level were celebrated, from the most lo-fi to those of the highest production value (Waldorf et al., n.d.).

### **Analysis of Audience Response**

By all measures and metrics, the social media campaign was a success due to its popularity with users over numerous social media platforms. By May 2020, there were already at least 100,000 recreations posted on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, blogs, etc. (Stephan & Waldorf, 2020). In the first two months of the launch, The Getty had a 207% change in their followers across all social media platforms which included 120,000 new Instagram followers and a 366% increase on Facebook with 18,000 new followers. (Waldorf et al., n.d.). On Instagram alone, the number of posts with the hashtag #GettyMuseumChallenge total 63,927. While not affiliated with the museum itself, a Reddit community page was created by art enthusiasts who wanted to openly share their favorite recreations and gained over 17,500 members including over 600 individual subreddits containing user generated content which shows the ability for the campaign to reach a wider audience across multiple platforms without additional time or effort. (Romero, 2020). The sheer number of likes and retweets combined with the increase in followers show strong evidence of popular participation and enthusiastic engagement with the challenge.

In addition to an increased social media presence, international media press coverage soon followed with over 300 stories published about the #GettyMuseumChallenge in print, broadcast, and online outlets all over the globe including CBS Evening News, CNN, People Magazine, The New York Times, TIME Magazine, USA Today, and BuzzFeed just to name a few. (Waldorf et al.) James Corden praised the recreations as being, “If I’m honest almost better than the original” (The Late Late Show, 2020). Many of the inspired works made humorous reference to the pandemic such as an El Greco with toilet paper, an item of high demand (Figure 4.4) or a Frida Kahlo where birds and a cigarette were replaced with cleaning products and a thermometer (Figure 4.5). All of these added to the feeling of shared experience and reminded people at home that they were not alone and instead this virtual community was in it together.

**Figure 4.4**

*Recreation of Portrait of Jorge Manuel Theotokopoulos by El Greco, 1600-1605*



**Figure 4.5**

*Recreation of Me and My Parrots by Frida Kahlo, 1941*



The Getty's Stephan (2020), in an interview for NBC, was asked what made this social media challenge so appealing to so many people to which she answered,

I think it's the sense of community. We're not all Rembrandt, but we all can make something. We're all creative and I think what people really enjoy is both the doing, but even more so seeing how clever other people are.

Echoing this sentiment in Smithsonian Magazine, she was quoted as saying,

Being at home, people are feeling isolated, so this has been a fun way to have a community not only with friends and family, but also with friendly strangers on the web. It's really an attempt to build community around art for people who love art and appreciate it, whether or not you're an artist. (Nalwecki, 2020)

Accolades from industry professionals further provide evidence of the success and excellence of the Getty Museum Challenge and its ability to reach and resonate with a global audience. The

campaign went on to become a finalist in Hashtag for the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Shorty Awards, an international competition honoring brand, agencies & organizations producing great content across digital and social. The Getty Museum Challenge was also nominated for a Webby Award, the leading international award honoring excellence on the internet which is selected by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences, for the best social media account or content created by or executed on behalf of an organization, publication, or institution dedicated to arts and culture. By selection of the public with votes numbering in the millions from all over the world, the campaign in its category won the Webby People's Voice Award, Arts & Culture Social, 2021 (The Webby Awards, 2021).

The response to the #GettyMuseumChallenge was so strong and heartfelt by people all over the world, that numerous requests within the community prompted the creation of a book which was produced by the publication department of the Getty. Curated by themes, the coffee table book *Off the Walls* contains 246 of the most brilliant and imaginative re-creations chosen by the Getty editors with a few of the most popular being *The Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Johannes Vermeer (Figure 4 and 5) and Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (Stephan and Waldorf, 2020).

**Figure 4.6**

*Girl with a Pearl Earring and recreation, Off the Walls p. 54-55*





**Figure 4.7**

*Recreations of Girl with a Pearl Earring, Off the Walls p. 56-57*



The book was made available for purchase, both in print and as an e-book, with all proceeds going to Artist Relief, a charity supporting artists who experienced financial challenges during the pandemic. (Stephan & Waldorf, 2020). The book's title not only speaks to the whimsical and quirky DIY nature of the challenge, but also to the transcendent and timeless nature of the experience, bringing artworks to life outside the gallery and into the digital space, bringing people together with two-way participation between museum and audience, anchoring each other during this specific time in history where connection allowed for escape from isolation.

Just as in Castro's (2012) curriculum model, this challenge allowed for collective knowledge within the system to be shared and a space to be created where everyone's knowledge and creativity could interact, the museum here becoming a co-participant with the audience. Social media facilitates a networked environment where people not only learn from the museum, but from others, and it is that connection that prompts further investigation, inquiry, and expression. Longhenry (2007) reiterates that art museum learning is not merely about acquiring knowledge, but instead emphasizes that,

Effective art museum learning experiences are intrinsically motivated, self-directed, embody a high degree of control, and result in the expansion and transformation of the self. They transcend the constraints of both self and time. They include interaction with an environment set aside for that purpose, bring people together for a shared experience, are characterized by a desire to connect with a collective human presence, and are often described in spiritual terms. (p. 186)

While Longhenry (2007) is specifically talking about “magical” learning experiences that may happen in museum auditoriums and/or classrooms, the findings of this case study show that these characteristics and qualities can also be experienced digitally among the online space with great impact and effect.

Kelly (2013) urges museums to recognize that the boundaries between their audience and institution are breaking down and poses the question, “How are museums encouraging social learning and collaboration between the physical, online, and mobile spaces?” (p. 63). Forced to reckon with the pandemic and the inability of people to visit the museum, The Getty put this question at the heart of their response and being mindful of the needs of their audience, launched the Getty Museum Challenge which provided an opportunity for creative expression and dialogue about art using their extensive online collection and digital resources that resonated with people of all ages, making for a positive experience guided by the museum, but ultimately driven by those who participated by recreating and sharing works of art. In describing the very nature of the challenge, Stephan (2020) stated, “It really has a life of its own. This is really something that belongs to the internet, not to us.” The role of the museum as the arbiter of truth and the disseminator of knowledge shifted to one of facilitator, co-creator, and co-curator along



with the public, inviting their personal narratives, interpretations, and conversations to lead art experiences and learning.

The question for the future and what demands further investigation becomes how do campaigns like these shape experiences for visitors and how can museums leverage social media to achieve a connection with their audience that complements both the virtual and physical experience. In a discussion about this idea of the participatory museum and what that means for the connected museum, Shelley Bernstein (2011) of the Brooklyn Museum raises these very questions regarding the challenges of sustaining audience participation:

How do we create engaging experiences consistently, so that visitors feel participation is part of the overall culture of the institution? I've seen a lot of one offs, where there's a burst of activity around one single project, but the challenge is creating a consistency so that valued participation is always part of the museum experience. In addition, these projects too often just exist online and not within the walls of the institution when people visit. The challenge is creating an overall experience that works both online and off and one that consistently allows visitors to participate in meaningful ways. (Kelly, 2013, p. 65)

Is the Getty Museum Challenge a one off? This perhaps may be the largest limitation of the study as it's unimaginable to think of similar circumstances that might replicate the exact conditions which spawned such a viral phenomenon, especially since the impact of the pandemic was devastating to so many communities, but the joy and spirit of the challenge is unprecedented and worth noting. The self-guided learning and enthusiastic participation becomes something that educators and museum professionals strive for in their programming and social media strategy as museums search for new and exciting ways to interact, communicate, and engage

with the public. Booth et al. (2020) discuss this organizational change revolving around social media and its possibilities as part of the ‘participatory turn’ in which the practice and purpose, as well as public expectations, of contemporary museums include the ideals of prosumer culture, democratization, distribution of power, dialogue, and co-creation. Social media may not fulfill all these ideals, but its ever present and exponential impact cannot be ignored, thus the goals and objectives of museums of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will find its thoughtful and strategic implementation integral to their success.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

What made this social media campaign special was the participatory nature and the connection of art enthusiasts young and old that rallied around the central purpose of the challenge no matter their experience or knowledge level. Not only were people able to see and appreciate works of art, but they were inspired and responded to the creativity of the recreations, giving the original artwork new life in a reauthored new context. Everyone was able to be an artist whether it be Michelangelo, Matisse, or Mickalene Thomas.

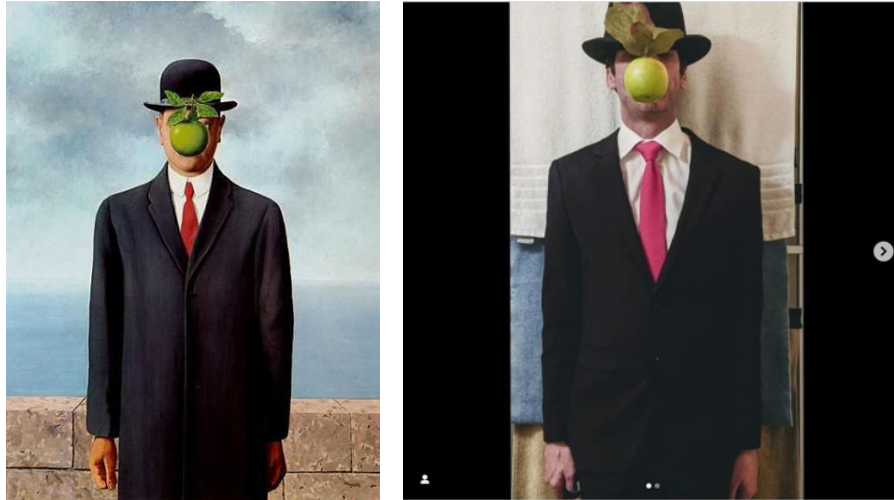
The Getty Museum Challenge embodies the important themes of the transformative museum which are recommended guiding principles for the future:

- We are social
- We are mobile
- We are digital learners
- We are participatory and sharing
- Our skills and toolkits are broad, combining both traditional and new ways of working
- We embrace organizational change (Kelly, 2013, p. 55)

The Getty Museum Challenge was so meaningful to me personally, not only did I choose to make it the focus of my research, but I also participated with my own entry, a recreation of *The Son of Man* by René Magritte. (Figure 5.1)

**Figure 5.1**

*The Son of Man by René Magritte, 1964 and my recreation from Instagram*



Seeing all the humor and ingenuity provided comfort and entertainment and a much-needed escape from the chaos and uncertainty of the pandemic. In the spring of 2020, I had just begun my studies and research preparation and was inspired to bring rich art experiences to life and the Getty Museum Challenge led me to ask questions about how museums can leverage technology such as social media to engage and educate their audience. Hull and Scott (2013) answer this question by describing the new role museums can play within the digital world utilizing the tools of social media:

By designing innovative interfaces, bringing together diverse communities, and providing ample opportunities for participants to interact with artifacts and reposition them socially in the construction of their own identity narratives, digital museums can play a role in mediating and informing the interactions between these participants and tracing out the unique histories that artifacts accumulate under continuous, diverse curation. In such ways, the museum can maintain its own authorial role in narrating the voice of art history

while opening up pathways for visitors to inscribe *their* stories into this history, unraveling new and unintended meanings from artifacts as they enter global spheres of circulation and appropriation. (p. 146-147)

The Getty Museum Challenge sheds light on these future possibilities for museums while acting as a time capsule, capturing a worldwide movement that celebrated art in the face of adversity and isolation. What is clear is that the initial goal stated by Potts (2020) to create participatory conversations and publish content that was “uplifting, inspirational, and focused on creating community through art” was achieved (p. 218). In so doing, the challenge continues with its legacy forever set, both in the minds of those who lived it and through its digital footprint where it will surely inspire new generations as they continue in a tradition of viewing art objects of the past and recontextualizing them into new art objects while producing conversation and dialogue surrounding art that live on into the future.

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