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A New Museum Experience; Survival and Best Practices

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 with Museum Focus

Under the Supervision of Dr. Ross H. Schlemmer

By

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Abstract

This study researches how museums adapt to changing technologies as well as opportunities to retain their audience and visitors while finding new best practices to help in their survival as an institution. It examines how different museums in the United States predict the trajectory of their museum will continue forwards through the different offerings they provide. This study explores how technology and social media, modern exhibitions and initiatives, community outreach and campaigns, and more contribute to the museums' continuation in the current industry landscape. I examine these ideas through interviewing art museum educators at institutions around the US, examining the materials and presence they put up online, and by taking online reviews by the community into consideration. Museums are being forced to adapt and become the future of modern educational institutions and understanding how this happens can lead to greater success in the future.

Keywords: Museums, Museum Education, Art Education

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A New Museum Experience; Survival and Best practices

Chapter 1

Introduction

Growing up my mother loved to take me to museums; she would take my older sibling and me around the galleries to look at and learn from the exhibits. I loved to get to look at the beautiful art and listen to my mom as she talked about what the informational placard said while also telling me about what she thought of the piece, while I interjected my own thoughts of course. As I grew older and started to attend art classes at school and was able to read on my own, I began to not enjoy art museums as much. I did not want to read the little signs quietly or stand and look at a painting from two feet away, I wanted to talk to someone about what they saw, I wanted to touch the textures and even try creating the art myself. The museum was less of an enjoyable experience because I was on my own, experiencing it silently. I wanted to engage and be entertained in an environment set up for a person to stand, look, and contemplate instead, as art museums have been designed for years. This may be because of the generation I was born into, as I was raised between the Millennials and Gen Z. Growing up my generation was just beginning to have access to the internet and becoming a part of a hyperconnected, multidimensional, experience-oriented generation (Walhimer, 2022). The drive to learn wasn't missing, but the environment wasn't set up for a child like me to engage with the art and nurture curiosity.

Now that I have grown and worked in a number of museums myself, I have found that the museums have begun to adapt to the needs of the visitors in new ways. It once was that going to a museum was a daunting and boring experience that young visitors felt they were going to be dragged through. Complaints that the pictures on the wall are old, the sculptures are falling apart,

and the building smells funny are just a few things that I have heard from the mouths of young visitors in museums. This is not the case for museums actively making changes in their spaces and programming as they move into the future. More and more institutions are finding ways to engage visitors with the materials; they have been developing activities, exhibits, and more in the museums and found new ways to engage with the public outside of the buildings. This is a direct result of museum staffs' efforts to create opportunities for visitor engagement in ways that cater to the wants and needs of their audiences. These efforts to change for their visitors and to enrich the museum experience will be continuing because of the response of the public to these new initiatives.

According to a 2017 survey by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, only 24% of Americans had visited an art museum in the past year. This was below the percentage of the 2002 and 1992 surveys but a 3% increase from 2012. The study also says that from 1982 to 2012 the greatest decline in museum visitations was in the 18 to 44 age bracket with a decline of 17% and it has yet to be made up, though there was a 15% increase between 2012 and 2017 (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017). In 2020, the percentages of museum visitations would change drastically and detrimentally because of the events of the global COVID-19 pandemic, as exemplified by a survey from the American Alliance of Museums. The pandemic led to closures of public institutions, and many museums were not able to reopen. The survey was conducted from December 2021 to January 2022, and showed that of the museums that had reopened were operating with an average of only 62% of their pre-pandemic attendance. Around the US museums are reevaluating what their best practices are after so many changes to meet the newfound needs of the public. Museums may still be institutions for higher learning, but they are now focusing a lot on adapting towards the public in new ways in order to increase

the number of visitors to museums. Now museums are a place for people from all walks of life to come and explore art and their own creative spirit. Visitors to museums have the opportunity to engage with these works in the museum in many ways.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study is to look into how museum initiatives are engaging with their audience in person, online, and in the community. This study also considers what is driving the changes we see, and what are some of the priorities museum educators have when creating new programs, spaces, and partnerships. Questions such as:

1. How are museums creating interactive and social experiences for their visitors?
2. How are museums keeping up with changing technologies and utilizing their online presence?
3. How are museums being conscientious about the needs of the community?
4. How are museums attaining desired cultural and societal relevance in the current landscape of America?

By understanding how museums are changing through initiatives we are seeing the progression forward, stagnation is the enemy of educational institutions. This research examines how we are encouraging learning and engagement through programs, activities, and social media as to better the understanding of what works so others can also use these methods in their museums. In this study, I will begin reviewing literature relating to initiatives being used to keep museums relevant and current research, then explore current interaction in the museum. It follows then to look at how social media and the public interact in continuation of museum efforts, then the public campaigns and social events that are used for this purpose as well.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will examine the results of my study to understand the current trends of best practices and put that towards what the museum of the future could look like.

Chapter 2

Methods

Study Overview

This research is conducted using a case study methodology looking into multiple museums in the United States with input from education professionals as well as the content created by the museum and put out for interaction with the visitors in-person and online. A case study is a type of qualitative study which attempts to gain in-depth understanding by intensive descriptions and analyzing a system, in this case, art museum education in the United States. This case study is conducted through an educational lens and uses interviews, observation, and online documentation.

Boundaries of the Case

This study is conducted using the shared experiences from museum professionals and evidence gleaned from public sources and social media pages. The study is done in an effort to understand the new initiatives of the museum industry and what best practices are coming to light through them. Interviews were conducted with four museum educators, they include ideas, thoughts, and information about the art museums' programming while looking back over the past five years in the art museum industry through the museums' practices and initiatives, and examining their successes and failures. I look at why the initiatives matter, why they are thought to be the best practices, and how they created connections. The museums were chosen based off a number of factors including having an online presence in the form of a website, social media accounts, and reviews. They had to have an education department and have interactive elements in their museum with the public connecting to what they had on display as well as offer some

kind of programming for different ages. The museum also had to be located in the United States, where I selected a number of different sized museums and reached out to their education teams. Of those I reached out to these four were selected and interviews were conducted with their staff.

Data Collection Tools and Analysis

By conducting interviews, I am getting first-person interpretations of what is happening in museums and education today as well as narratives elaborating on posited questions. The observations are conducted by myself, allowing me to see the influence of the museum education and social cultural impact through their online presences and relation to what has been discussed previously as examined in the literature review. The online documentation and survey allow for community responses and impressions as a secondary source of what is working and not working in art museums today.

The interviews are conducted using the same questions asked in a format of one-on-one discussions with the museum education professional. The interview is a series of open-ended questions designed to allow the art museum professional to interpret the question and explain their answer as they see fit. They also allow for some narrative direction where the interviewee can share instances of relevance or ones that stand out to them. I conducted research into the public's response to different campaigns and social events through museum websites, reviews left on websites, and social media for their interpretations of the content. While looking into museums' social media, websites, and promotional materials I sought to understand where they focus their online presence and what they highlight to draw in visitors and promote themselves as well as where they have room for improvement.

The interviews, evaluation, and interpretation of current and former museum initiatives and practices is pertinent to understand what has evolved and in the art museums' current best practices. The interviews provide an understanding of the current goals and mindsets of museum educators. By looking online, we are seeing societal responses to the initiatives providing feedback helping to understand what people prefer from their museum experiences. Inference from these sites also showcases what the museum finds most pertinent to share, emphasizing their priorities further through action. By combining these elements and examining them together we get a more rounded picture as to what the new best practices in art museums are, rather than a single perspective.

Biases and Limitations

Biases for this case study include my personal connections to the museums I have chosen, previous experience in museums, previous research, and who responded to my requests for interviews. I personally worked at the Joslyn Art Museum, the mid-sized museum I am studying, under the supervision of the Education Director who I interviewed. There I worked in the interactive art space and was able to hear from the architects and designers involved in the ongoing renovation of the entire museum. I have also previously worked at a children's museum, volunteered at a natural history museum, and worked at a science and history focused museum, influencing my questions and understanding of the museum industry. Another museum I chose for this study, The Frost Art Museum in Miami Florida, is located on the campus of the university that I attended for undergraduate schooling. I visited this museum multiple times while attending this school and attended multiple lectures there. Another bias I have is being part of a generation geared towards the utilization of modern and advancing technologies as a way of presenting and engaging with material culture. A limitation is that the museums I have in this

paper were chosen with purpose but there were a number of other potential interviewees that did not respond in such a way that allowed them to be a part of this study.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Long gone are the days when museums were seen as institutions for the rich, artistic, and pretentious; museums began changing their presentation towards the public post-World War II and that evolution continues to this day as seen in Suamarez-Smith (2021). John Dewey wrote that Art Museums are “home for works of art... apart from the common life,” while Smith says this is no longer a valid consideration and that museums are no longer antithetical to the interest and occupations of the community (Smith 1966). Museums are becoming an integral component to the fabric of the community they serve, creating experiences to inspire creativity and curiosity in their visitors.

According to Walhimer (2022) the museum experience can be delineated into three parts, the pre-visit, the visit, and the post visit. The pre-visit provides the context for the visitor and creates their awareness of the museum's existence and opportunities. This awareness can be created through online presence, word of mouth, and printed materials to name a few, and will be the first impression of the museum for the visitor. This part of the experience is where it will stop for some; if they cannot understand the website, how they could get there, where they would need to park, how big the museum is and thus how much time they could spend there, if there is something of interest there, etc. then their interest will wain and they may never step foot on museum grounds. The visit is what creates an emotional and mental response in the visitors, it contains the most actions; this is where rules and expectations are established and met. In order for a successful visit the atmosphere and entrance have to be welcoming, there have to be elements wherein any visitor can create an experience, and the visitor must leave with the impression of wanting to know more that makes them want to come back for another experience.

There is also where museum designers have to consider the touchstones, the elements of the museum which create lasting impressions and where people spend the most time, this can lead to interesting data on what the museum visitor likes rather than what the curators and designers think is important. The post visit is the impact that remains that makes the visitor want to return to the museum. It is then retaining information and emotional considerations, possibly renewed engagement with curriculum they are being taught, and feeling like they could have a new experience the next time they visit.

Charles Suamarez Smith *The Art Museum in Modern Times* 2021

The book *The Art Museum in Modern Times* by Charles Saumarez Smith (2021) lists museums from around the world's gradual transition from what they were to what they are now leading to understanding current practices in museums. This book serves as a resource for understanding the gradual progression of museums and how they evolve to try and find best practices but also create their own niches for their viewers. The first chapter titled The Modern Museum explores thirteen museums which each contributed to the transition of museums for the public including moving away from the city, creating different types of buildings, creating new context for artworks in the museum and the narratives in the museum. The next chapter, the Postmodern Museum, looks at ten more museums including ones going private, the separation of the museum's architecture and the work inside, creating museums more like amusement parks such as the Getty, creating places of contemplation and introspection such as the Benesse House, and different styles of museums. The third chapter is about museums for the New Millennium evaluating further of how spaces in the museum are being used, how history is involved in the museum and their works, different types of mediums present in galleries and that changing the needs of space within the museum. The fourth chapter covers the Museum Reinvented, covering

the new ideas challenging what a museum ‘should be,’ how objects are supposed to be presented inside a museum, how people are stepping away from being big institutions while others are capitalizing on it. All of this shows the gradual progression in a non-linear exploration of what ways museums can be designed and present their materials to the public as well as explaining some of the elements we see in museums today. We are still continuing this experiment as there is still no one way a museum should be, it has to adapt and change to its location, both physically and relative to its community’s wants and needs.

Mark Walhiemer *Designing Museum Experiences* 2022

Museums can be civic anchors and community gathering places, stepping away from the artifact containing warehouses they have been in the past. Post World War II museums’ role began to change from a paragon of class and virtuous education to institutions of learning for the public (Walhiemer, 2022). Not only did this shift create a more visitor centered museum experiences, but art museums around the world began to reevaluate how they were presenting their art, who they were reaching with it, and what they were trying to teach. When we examine the visitors to museums today, Walhiemer divides the visitor’s personal drives into five main categories. Thirty eight percent fall into the Explorers category, they are curiosity driven, have a generic interest in museum content, and want their attention grabbed. This type of visitor could be a student, a family, a couple on a date, they are at the museum to explore but still will gain something from being there. The next largest group are Facilitators who make up twenty-four percent, they are the ones who are at the museum for someone else, they are accompanying a social group or a specific person and are driven to help the others’ learning experience. This can be parents taking their children, teachers, elderly aides, people who are there accompanying and helping someone else get the experience they want. Next are the Experience Seekers making up

twenty-one percent of visitors and see the museum as an important destination and want to cross it off their list with a 'been there done that' mentality. This type of visitor involves more the people visiting from out of town, they are hitting the highlights of the city and are crossing experiences off their list; it also includes locals who want to be able to say they have been and experienced the museum. The Rechargers make up nine percent and are at the museum for a contemplative, spiritual, enlightening, and restorative experience. This may be a smaller group but there are many museums that have spaces to cater to this such as contemplation pools, meditation gardens, etc. Lastly, eight percent are professionals and hobbyists who are there for something in the museum and want a content-related experience. They may have been drawn in because they saw something posted online that the museum has put on display that matches their niche interest or that relates to what they themselves make and now want to see it in person. These percentages may differ some for art museums specifically, but give a good idea of who are the most common visitors who choose to go to the museum not for a school trip or a program. When examining the creation of art museum design and programming this has to be considered and included in the plan to create a successful museum. The mark of success is dependent of the mission and values established by the institution itself but the practices we see spread out across the industry.

As we look at museums, we begin to see a trend towards interaction including having designated spaces and programs to entice the exploration and experience driven visitors and their facilitators to come to the museums. "Museums that are taking risks are visitor centric, have participatory experiences, smart technology, a new generation of leaders, and are relevant and inclusive. As they ride the currents of change, they still are retaining their power of legitimacy as repositories of culture." (The Future Museum Project, 2017).

Melinda Mayer *A Postmodern Puzzle: Rewriting the Place of the Visitor in Art Museum Education* 2005

Following movements in the 1970s many more art museums and their educators have been moving away from passive listening and towards exchange between the visitor and museum educators. In Mayer's (2005) article on the place of the visitor in the art museum she examines how museums and their educators became aware of "John Dewey's beliefs on learning by doing, Jerome Bruner's assertion that learning occurs properly in an active, stimulating environment, and Viktor Lowenfeld's claim that all the senses are needed in the learning process," and how this led to art educators developing and advocating for the use of interactive teaching techniques in the art museum. Mayer stipulates that art museum educators also looked to educational psychology and pedagogy in developing interactive practices. Docents were also expected to create experiences beyond factual information sharing using techniques not traditional to the museum environment to "captivate the eyes, mind, heart, and engage the voices of museum visitors." The article also brings up the American Association of Museums Task Force publication on *Museum Education's Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* in 1991 confirmed that museum educators were changing museum environment and mission. It brought up the museum educators' focus on the public role of museum education to be inclusive, be leaders, have community presence, and to serve the public as a whole.

Gensler *Museum Futures* 2015

According to a survey report by Gensler in 2015 the museum visitor experience will continue to change and evolve. It stipulates that the museums today are facing challenges with shifting demographics, new visitor expectations, funding issues, and evolving technologies integrating with the museum. Ideally, museums will make changes and accommodations for

these, which will lead to more museum advocates, though it requires institutions rethinking and reworking their environments in the building and online to promote “deeper understanding of collections and missions, greater interactivity, a fuller range of activities, and increased revenue stability.” The study believes that visitor experience will continue to trend towards being interactive and self-directed with community focus growing and a more public facing approach to the museum in general. It is likely education and recreation will blend, according to this study, emphasizing activity focused programming and community engagement facilitating a wonder-filled experience. The study suggests that museums will have to define target audiences, design specific programming for them, relate it to other institutions, include technological components and online materials, and cultivate future audiences through youth and family programs supporting lifelong appreciation of museums.

Adams, Moreno, Polk, & Buck, *The Dilemma of Interactive Art Museum Spaces*, 2003

In a case study conducted by Adams et al. (2003) there has been an uptick in the number of art museums developing interactive spaces and exhibitions in an effort to “attract more diverse audiences, encourage repeat visitation, and enhance student learning.” Some choose to focus on the in-gallery tours and activities and making them more interactive while others are making physical areas dedicated to tactile engagement with art. The study examines how there are issues with interactive spaces, such as creating authentic engagements, rather than play experiences without the depth for emotional and intellectual connections to the objects and experiences being presented. The study looked at Art Sparks as an example of taking art activities for families and kids into the standing galleries and found that it would often take repeat exposure for people to be comfortable with taking the activities into non kid-centered spaces in the museum. It also reported that docents could sometimes have a hard time leading inquiry-based discussions. It

looked at KIDSPACE which provided activities relating to the art on exhibit through interactive projections with movement-based color changing showing showed how interactive activities don't have to be hands-on and technology can be great but requires a lot of maintenance. Some people could not understand that while their movements could change what they were seeing on the screens that they were not supposed to touch them. It also talked about how interactivity as a part of the experience can overshadow any learning and be seen as a do it and be done mentality leading to no lasting impact. They consider how building strategies for teaching and learning about interactive art can change educator's way of teaching and learning about works of art regardless of media. The last case they looked at was the Unmuseum whose goal "is to make contemporary art accessible to children and parents by presenting works of art that fascinate and engage-physically and intellectually audiences of the widest possible age range." The Unmuseum also bemoans the difficulty in creating an art experience that is not considered just an art playground and created multiple prototypes to develop their museum's interactive space as a touchable experience near the exhibitions that relates to school curriculums. These three cases in the study each had their own benefits and detriments to the museum by creating interactive and engaging spaces. They showed how hands on and hands-off interactivity can be fun but also confuse first-time visitors, how having spaces for interaction and children near the exhibits can be great for engagement but lead to a harsher transition between the two spaces, and how there is a difference between creating a play space in the museum and an interactive learning space.

Blume, Henning, Herman, & Richner, *Looking to Learn: Museum Educators and Aesthetic Education*, 2008

Using the Rembrandt project as an example, this article talks about a website's ability to create connections and help visitors "decode" a work of art in a way that fits the visitor's

schedule and allows the visitor to choose their experience with art going as in-depth as they want. The article argues that a central component of the Rembrandt Project is the “fundamental tenet that no virtual interaction or exercise can expect to replicate the museum experience. But introducing educators to specifically chosen works of art in a variety of contexts will, we hope, expand and supplement seeing objects firsthand in the museum setting” (Blume et al. 2008).

Providing a museum experience online is a linkage to art and can help create an aesthetic experience, but a physical museum can foster that and help it become a learning experience. The article argues that the ideal museum education experience “involves open-ended discussion and questioning strategies designed to create an environment that provides support, security, and trust,” while offering multiple perspectives.

Henry, *The Future of Museums? It's Interactive*, 2018

When looking at interactive elements in museums, some such as Catherine Henry believe that new technologies provide exciting innovative ways to create narratives and share experiences. She stipulates that if museums are “serving as time capsules for collective memory, the opportunity to open a time capsule with virtual or augmented reality is an effective tool.”

Though she goes on to say that *Virtual Reality* (VR) and *Augmented Reality* (AR) cannot replace curation or exploration of the ideas about humanity, society, culture, and the world we inhabit that can be found through real life interactions.

Wiener, *The Rise of ‘Immersive’ Art*, 2022

When looking at how immersive art is impacting museums, groups like teamLab work to convince visitors to “go beyond passively observing,” and instead be “active protagonists in decentered narratives” in museums. The belief that museums can utilize the internet rather than be replaced by it centers around the museum mentality seeing the visitor as a ‘user’ of a product

creating interactivity the way one might on the web. The idea that immersive art experiences are being commercialized and that they hold little educational value is posited here with the belief the experience may tempt people back towards education-oriented institutions.

From This Readers Can Understand

There is a lot to be seen on interactive spaces and activities within museums and a huge part of that is trial and error, finding the elements that work for children and families and emphasizing those to create the museum experience that brings people back. When doing my research about the future of the museum's best practices, so many articles talk about the benefits and detriments of technology in the museum. The focus on technology in these articles writing about the future of museums shows society's belief that institutions will begin focusing on utilizing new technologies to bring more people in while most of the museums discussed use it to augment their programming, gallery experiences, and do not focus on it. Technology is a tool to create the experience, museum educators have to work to find the best way to efficiently use this tool in their museum while still inciting curiosity, exploration, and discussion. The articles focused on the museum's ability to cater to the visitor experience within the museum, and yet a lot of what I discussed with the museum educators speaks to the museum's focus on programming as a way of bringing people into the museum and instigating relationships between the public and art (see Chapter 4 Discussion: *Focus on Public Initiatives, Programs, and Social Events*).

Chapter 4: Discussion

Museum Histories

Small Museum: Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum – Miami, Florida

The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum was founded as The Art Museum at FIU in 1977 and was approximately 3,000 square feet and grew to achieve national and international acclaim and was a recognized asset to the arts community of Miami-Dade. It received AAM accreditation and in 2001 became a Smithsonian affiliate. The museum was well known for its innovative exhibits and enthralling lecture series. The museum was renamed after the groundbreaking for new facilities in 2003 to become the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum. With the renovation finished in 2008 the museum now occupies 46,000 square feet including a lecture hall, library, interaction room, three floors of galleries, café, and more. The museum also serves both the community and the college campus it resides on with student and faculty exhibitions as well as education programming. The Frost Art Museum has a threefold mission: “to be a campus resource for the entire FIU community, to offer interdisciplinary training in the arts for the next generation of artists and art historians and to serve as a premier cultural destination for residents of and visitors to one of America’s most vibrant cities,” (Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum, 2023).

I corresponded with Miriam Machado who is the Director of Education at the museum. She has previously worked as a member of community and museum organizations, on school boards, as the museum division director at the Florida Art Education Association, and has presented her work and findings at national and state conferences. Her chief responsibilities are to oversee all educational programming, align with state and national standards, meet the needs of and support the community, and move the museums mission, vision and strategic plan

forwards. She believes that the greatest strengths of the Frost Art Museum are that it is community focused, free, and has a strong staff that believe in upholding high standards and best practices. The draw of the museum is the range of topics that are explored through the many exhibitions that come through, their museum's agility and ability to tailor to the needs of the community as well as include them in the decision-making conversations.



Image 1 Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum front view



Image 2 Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum View from back

Mid-sized Museum: Joslyn Art Museum – Omaha, Nebraska

The Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska is an example of a museum in transition making great efforts to improve and become a museum of the future. This Museum has served the community since opening its doors in 1931 only briefly stopping during its last construction and revitalization effort concluding in 1994. This museum was made as a memorial by the Joslyn family but has served as a cultural monument and center for the Omaha community with multiple permanent collection galleries as well as traveling exhibition spaces, a concert hall, a large courtyard, a lobby, and a reception room/lounge. In its basement it had two studios where young artists took classes and participated in programs, an interactive room, café, gift shop, lecture hall, library and more. The museum is now under a massive renovation because it sees that it has needs that must be met for the community with their collections and space.

The Joslyn Art Museum and community are in agreement that the museum needs more space and updates so a new addition with a larger entrance, more galleries, more garden spaces, and more studios is now coming into being. The plan to renovate and refurbish had been around for a while but the need and ability have been brought to the foreground, especially in these times post quarantining for the COVID-19 virus. The museum team has been working online, onsite, and throughout the community through the pandemic, changed what was available in the museum, and evolved further to keep up with the times and needs in a post- COVID-19 era. I interviewed Nancy Round, the Education and Outreach Director for the museum, and she told me about the hopes for the museum going forward. Round has worked at the museum for over 20 years and works directly with the directors, curation, and exhibition staff to create well-rounded and interesting programs and opportunities for engagement with her team at the Joslyn. The museum, she ventures, derives some of its greatest strengths from its team who work well together. She also believes that the collection is another great strength of the museum having been built up for years with carefully curated objects on display. Round postulates that since the museum is not too large it is able to be more agile and to make changes as needed to the benefit of the museum and its visitors.

The Joslyn Art Museum, as Round says, has a strong collection, a good connection with the community, and a rich history. The experience of going to this cultural center in Omaha is one that many people have had and are now looking forwards to doing again when it reopens in 2024 with its new wing. The building had elements working against it and this renovation is going to help there too. While the original building is beautiful with its carved stone facades telling stories in their engravings and the pink marble remains stunning almost a century after it was built, the museum entrance was hard to find, a detriment to the visitors wanting to feel

welcomed upon walking up to the building. There is no specific space for fieldtrips and large groups upon entering, the lecture hall is older and no one wants to sit in those seats, there is not enough of the collection on the floor, there isn't enough studio space for the programs they wanted to run. These are all complaints that are being addressed with this new build. The museum is not just adapting to modern social and cultural needs but also the physical needs of the public as well. The mission statement is as follows: "Joslyn Art Museum collects, preserves and interprets the visual arts of the highest quality, fostering appreciation and enjoyment of art for the benefit of a diverse audience" (Joslyn Art Museum, 2023).



Image 3: Joslyn Art Museum front view pre-reconstruction



Image 4: Joslyn Art Museum Artistic rendering of new construction

Large Museum: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art – Kansas City, Missouri

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art was founded by two entities joining together to create a historic art museum for the metropolitan of Kansas City. The William Nelson estate was left after their deaths to three trustees who were to then collect art for the planned museum. The estate of Mary McAfee Atkins then proposed to join forces as she had left money specifically to buy the land for a great art museum. Even with wars and changes in focus of the museum and its collections the museum thrives in Kansas City to this day. There was a large addition to the museum in 2007 called the Bloch building which increased the museum's space with more galleries, a new lobby, an art library, a café, and doubled the overall space of the museum. The

Museum's buildings and massive lawns provide a sprawling place filled with art of all kinds for the public.

I spoke to three members of the staff at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, an Interpreter Kerry Butcher and two members of the Community Programs team, Senior Manager of Community Programs Sarah Hyde Schmiedeler and Manager of Community and Access Programs Jackie Niekamp. Butcher spoke with me about some of the ways the curation and learning and engagement teams work together to create programming and spaces within the museum for visitor interpretation. When talking the ability to adapt, rethink, and reimagine came up a lot as the approach towards presenting to visitors. When speaking with Schmiedeler and Niekamp we discussed the massive amount of programming and events that happen regularly on site. They discussed how proud of their museum's collection they are as it is encyclopedic, with art from across the world and all different times. The museum allowing anyone who comes to be a part of the community, the museum isn't just for tourists, and the museum being free are two reasons the staff I spoke with believe they have a strong museum. The museum also has a large and varied staff from different backgrounds of education and museum professions, as well as teachers who come for the studio classes, that are all dedicated to the museum's goals and plans. The Museum website has a Strategic Plan pdf from 2021 available showing the museum's mission to be that "The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art invites all people to explore the art in its care, and through its broad collection, the depths and complexities of human experiences." While the website also has a much longer mission statement saying:

"The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art invites all people to explore the art in its care, and through its broad collection, the depths and complexities of human experiences. We welcome and provide free access to everyone to enjoy and contemplate artistic creations

from 5,000 years ago to present day. We believe that art has the ability to uplift, surprise, challenge, and transform. It gives expression not only to distant cultures and times, but also to immediate voices and issues, and provides avenues for exploring the world, past and present, and for informing our future. We nurture the people who are dedicated to the museum's success and who care for the collection and campus, and we support and learn from our audiences and our communities. Through this, we create ambassadors for a better society. With art as our focus, the Nelson-Atkins strives to create a sense of belonging for all people" (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Strategic Plan, 2022)



Image 5: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Large Museum: Denver Art Museum – Denver, Colorado

The Denver Art Museum was founded in 1893 as the Denver Artists' club with thousands of works from around the world as well as from local artists. It has been internationally known for the Indigenous arts of North America collection as well as their American Art and Art of the Ancient Americas collections. It has been located in a number of different buildings but has ended up in two buildings next to one another, the Martin building (formerly the North Building) and the Hamilton Building opened in 2006. In 2015 with extra funding the museum began allowing visitors under 19 to get general admission for free. The two buildings on this downtown campus served until 2016 when they began renovations on the Martin building and reopened in

2021. The campus was reimagined and expanded with a new welcome center that has dining and guest services for its approximate 800,000 annual visitors.

I spoke with Heather Nielson who works as the Chief Learning and Engagement Officer since late 2019 and was previously the Director of Learning and Education; she has also worked as School Programs Specialist and Interpretive Specialist during her 21 years at the Denver Art Museum. Nielson believes the strengths of the museum are the social, cultural, and economic roles in the community and working for the community with extraordinary collections, and their personal expertise in knowledge pertaining to the collections. The Museum's education team centers around 4 areas of engagement at the Denver Art Museum: creative and public engagement, youth and community engagement, interpretative engagement, and lifelong learning. The Museum's mission statement is "to enrich the lives of present and future generations through the acquisition, presentation, and preservation of works of art, supported by exemplary scholarship and public programs related to both its permanent collections and to temporary exhibitions presented by the museum." (Denver Art Museum, 2023).



Image 6: Denver Art Museum

Physical Spaces and Environments in the Museum

All four museums have some kind of art classrooms, lecture hall, and dining in them. Three have interactive rooms dedicated spaces for children: *Art works: A Place for Curiosity* at the Joslyn, *Landscapes Studio* at the Denver Art Museum, and the *Kenan-Flagler Family Discovery Gallery* at the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum. There are also opportunities for interaction by the guests in the gallery spaces and through the social spaces in the museum set up such as interactive displays, sensors for digital exhibits, etc. All of this works together to create a social experience with the museum itself, encouraging the visitors to stay longer and to come back. With visitors having the option to purchase things at the museum they want to spend more time there, they can get a coffee or a bite to eat at the café or restaurant thus not having to leave if they get hungry or thirsty. They have gift shops with materials labeled for the museum or the art from their collection to have as souvenirs and to remind the visitor of their trip at a later point in time. By having these social spaces, the visitor is not just there to appreciate art but it becomes an even broader experience of eating and shopping. Interaction and hospitality mindedness in the museums has been growing and we are seeing more and more of it in new additions to museums in efforts to increase visitation and repeat visitors.

The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum Discovery Gallery

The Frost Art Museum has a gallery space dedicated to exploration and creation called the *Kenan-Flagler Family Discovery Gallery and Museum Terrace*. There are high-tech and low-tech art activities encouraging engagement with art and learning with some art that can be taken home. The space has a digital portrait drawing station that the resulting picture can be taken home or left on display, the visitor uses a stylus pen to draw on the screen, they can use different sizes and colors in the software program to do so, and then are able to print their

portrait out. The room has a small children's library, building blocks, poetry magnet letters on a wall, chalk and colored pencils allowing for art exploration. The activities are designed to promote creative thinking and observation. The Museum's interactive room is the main child-friendly part of the museum for visitors not there for programs or events and is a moderately sized space near the entrance of the museum. They also have a sculpture park that allows for the tactile exploration of the objects and, according to Miami Machado, they try to keep tactile objects on hand to increase sensory response.



Image 7: Kenan-Flagler Family Discovery Gallery

The gallery was created in the belief that hands-on activities help children learn and provide an art museum experience different from the typical standing galleries. The Museum also has had exhibits come it with interactive elements in the galleries, such as *The Art of Video Games* exhibition that allowed visitors to play and touch some of the exhibit games. There have also been other interactive activities with other traveling exhibitions and accompanying lectures.

On the ground floor of the Frost Museum are three other social spaces that are designed to create a well-rounded museum experience for visitors. There is no gift shop but there is a café attached to the museum that links to an outdoor patio space. The sitting space runs along the back of the café and the museum creating a connection between the spaces and more opportunities for flow when events happen at both the café and the museum. The library on the ground floor of the museum is not always open to the public but university staff and students

involved with the museum have access. The lecture hall and the space in the café offer different venues for conferences and lecture series to take place.

The Joslyn Art Museum Art Works

The Joslyn Art Museum uses an interactive space called *Art Works: A Place for Curiosity* that takes inspiration from other museums where visitors may take part in artistic exploration while also connecting to the permanent galleries above it. The space has nine hands-on activities designed in such a way that every visit can have a different experience as well as rotating take home art activities. Art Works was designed with the help of Nancy Round, the museum's Education Director, and other Museum education professionals as a space for children and families to get hands-on with creating and relating to art, provided by the Weitz Family. Put together after Round and the team had gone and seen other museums' interactive spaces, this one was designed with specific connections to the Joslyn's collection.



Image 8: *Art Works A Place For Curiosity*

The room's nine stations had connections to galleries upstairs to help visitors engage with the museum's collection through their own creation of art. One station is the portrait gallery where visitors could sit on opposite sides of a plexiglass mirror shaped window and draw each other's faces with expo markers while sitting next to copies of the paintings from the portrait gallery

upstairs. There were also Greek amphora and hydria that had no black figures or geometric designs but instead had markers and pictures of the pottery in the gallery for students to create their own designs and stories on the vases that could easily be cleaned away for the next visitor. There were plastic beads visitors could ‘thread’ on metal poles relating to the beading designs in the Native American galleries, a still life section that would be changed out every month and a reading library with books about art and museums for different reading levels. There were landscape and portrait ‘techno-canvas’ and a stop motion animation station as well with programs created by the local university. There was a take home art table in the center as well for guests to try their hand at an activity relating to the traveling exhibition or contemporary art gallery. The visitors to this room were making connections to the galleries above, sometimes without realizing it, while still getting to explore their own creativity.

The Joslyn Art Museum has multiple spaces in the museum for the social needs of the community and for educating the public. The museum has a library the staff use and university students and teachers in the area can request access to. There is also a concert hall that hosts events, a lecture hall which houses conventions and more in, the Durham café, and a gift shop with items from local artists. The discovery sculpture garden on the campus is next to the parking lot and provides a space for visitors to walk around and enjoy the outdoors, settle down for a picnic, and more. These social spaces are creating an experience for museum visitors outside the galleries and engagement with community members as long as people know they are there, that an event is happening, and they feel comfortable and welcomed enough to take part.

The Nelson Atkins Museum of Art

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art does not have a dedicated interactive space for families and children, although they have a lot of classes and events as part of their

programming. The Museum does provide coloring pages with online teaching videos that can be brought to the museum and enjoyed but there is not a designated space for interaction. There are a lot of opportunities in the galleries for the visitors to interpret the works in ways that inspire them and in-gallery activities led by staff members. The gift shop and Rozzelle restaurant, located in the center of the museum in a large beautiful courtyard, draw visitors in to enrich their experience with quick shopping and the opportunity to grab a bite to eat. The museum also has a café in their new building with drinks and pastries, the Atkins Auditorium, Kirkwood Hall, and the Bloch lobby for lectures, programs, and events. The museum lawns are the social space they use for events or programming and sculptures; some of the sculptures also allow for direct interaction by the visitor such as the glass maze and putt-putt course. This allows the visitor to engage with the art by taking part in it, by walking through the maze and seeing it from the inside out. The putt-putt course lets the visitor play a game created by artists showcasing how art can be fun and weird not just paintings on a wall.

The Denver Art Museum Landscape Studio

The Denver Art Museum has the *Landscape Studio* as a space of creativity and connection for visitors to interact with. This self-guided art-making space with demonstrative artists, open spaces, easels, and plenty of different mediums to make art with. Heather Nielson says that the location of the studio, by the doors welcoming people in by showing a space of creativity and inclusiveness of the visitor in making art, is integral in creating an environment of creativity, curiosity, and community. By having local artists demonstrating their craft in the space the visitors don't just see and be inspired by the art, but have the opportunity to speak with the artists and see them create different types of art strengthening a direct connection between visitors and young artists with established and growing artists in the area.



Image 8: Landscape Studio

There is a small lounge with couches when you first walk in, then there are tables with different art projects set out at the ready that have instructions on the tables. These projects encourage the young guests to work with their adults to understand the projects, their connection to art in the museum, and how they can create art of their own with the materials provided. The space is made for young artists to get inspired to create and want to explore art further while generating excitement about the collections within the museum as well.

The Museum has social spaces as well including a gift shop, The Ponti restaurant and Café Gio for dining, open space for public events on campus such as the atrium, boardroom, auditorium, two pavilions, Garden Room with Terrace and Prow, and the courtyard. The restaurant and café make what many believe to be a day long trip to see all seven floors of the museum more attainable, so the visitors do not have to venture far for a pick-me-up without having to go to a chain restaurant nearby. The other spaces listed above are great for rentals of the museum which can bring in more money for the museum while also providing spaces for

community events. While this museum does not have a library for the public it is located directly across from the Denver public library.

In-Museum Interaction Spaces

When examining museums with spaces dedicated to interactive art exploration, the spaces are in new buildings and renovated spaces. The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum was renovated in 2008 with the additions of the café, interactive room, terrace space, and updates to the library and lecture hall. These elements were what was decided was important enough to invest in when rebuilding to encourage museum visitors to come and come again. The Joslyn Art Museum is on its second major renovation, not including the added *Art Works* space in 2015, in an effort to create and utilize their spaces more efficiently and effectively. They are creating more space for field trips, a welcoming lobby space, updated studios for programming, and utilizing the social spaces in the museum such that people feel engaged with the museum. The addition of Art Works on its own shows the museum's desire to bring in families, create connections between the gallery art and what children can create, inspire, and break down some of the barriers faced by museums perceived as institutions where children are unwelcome.

These changes are coming because of the effort to understand what the visitor wants and how to effectively use the space, and to better display the collection of the museum itself. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art did their major renovation and addition when adding the Bloch building which added another dining space, a bigger gift shop, a new library, and more gallery space. This took the museum from a building of galleries for viewing and interpreting art to a new level and increased the social components available for visitors. The Denver Art Museum's choice to have the Landscape Studio greatly increased the opportunity for young visitors to engage with the art, it provides the kinesthetic learning opportunity in its own space, not just as

the interactive workshops and pop ups in the galleries. All these museums are adding elements that help with the visitor's connection to the museum and modify their social experience within the museum to be able to include more opportunities of enjoyment and connection. Later in this study we will look more closely at the offered programs and what initiatives the museums have been taking as explained by the staff member(s) I interviewed.

Museum Technology and Online Interactions with the Public

This section focuses on what technology the museums are using, the online presence of the museums, and how they are remaining relevant as seen on their websites. It also looks into the reviews left online that present to potential visitors the public views on the museum. I also consider how museums utilize technology for their visitors' experiences beginning before they arrive and continuing after they have left.

The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum's website is tied to Florida International University's site and exists under their banner. Miriam Machado, the director of education, admits the website needs updating, which is especially noticeable in their collections section as there are currently no exhibits or collections available to view online through that section of their website though there are marked pathways left that lead to nothing. You can see some previous exhibits if you go through the digital experiences page though you can get to a different section on Virtual Exhibitions which have exploratory 3D programs that allow the virtual visitor to walk through the space. Using these 3D tours, you can read some of the informational placards and see the gist of the art that is on display but really it is only a taste of what you would be able to see if one were to visit that exhibition. If someone went to the exhibit and in their post-visit was trying to remember a piece they saw or wanted to share the exhibit with someone else this would be a good tool. Or, if there was an exhibit that someone really wanted to see but missed this could be

a ‘close-enough’ approximation but does not focus on the works closely enough to be a tour of the gallery. While these virtual exhibitions are named on the page, there is no synopsis of the content either unless you go into the 3D reconstruction and attempt to read the wall writing within the program. The website had other tabs under the main ones that show themselves once clicked into, it is not as intuitive as one would like and leaves a lot of room for the virtual visitor to get lost looking for the information they need. The Museum does have an app as well though the website does not elaborate on what is on the app. Machado said the museum has audio guides and augmented reality features, and overall attempts to use technology to help people who learn in all different ways to engage with the museum. The website also stores the previous student exhibitions from the university and previous lectures on exhibitions. This storage and presentation is fantastic to see and investigate but is hard to navigate to on the website. The museum has also uploaded a number of their lectures, art activities, and events relevant to the museum and their community. These elements being available online create another pathway for potential museum visitors to connect with the museum and want to visit and engage further. The pertinent information to get people to the museum is much easier to find, existing under the visit banner, but is further sectioned off meaning people might not see the tabs on guidelines, tours, accessibility, and other subjects relevant to the potential visitor’s pre-visit research. Overall, the website is sufficient, but I agree with Machado’s assertion that it needs updated.

The Frost Art Museum has a Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram which all contribute to the presence of the Museum online in efforts to keep the community engaged and updated. They may engage the community by sharing a post on an upcoming program, share a detailed history of an artwork as a ‘spotlight,’ or give sneak peaks into new exhibitions. Social media is useful in spreading the message of the museum, marketing events and programs, reminding the

community of the museum's presence, and keeping people update on changes in the museum such as policies, pricing, etc. Most of the more detailed posts with more than one picture are found on the museum's Facebook page, followed by Instagram, and the Twitter page has the fewest posts with the least details. The museum may be dedicating more time to Facebook because they have over 19,000 followers on that site, about 9,050 on Instagram, and about 8,200 on Twitter meaning that they would want to put their energies towards the site that has the most followers and thus the most traffic. Facebook and Instagram also have a reputation as a place to go to find family friendly events and programs while Twitter is more known for the people that post on it and the polls that can be conducted which the Frost Art Museum seems to have not done. The posts on Twitter also seem more curated towards events while the Facebook and Instagram pages share more about the collections in the museum and inviting people to engage with the posts.

The Joslyn Art Museum was already working to make better use of technology and have more of an online presence before the closure due to renovations, but they have since hired a company to relaunch their website and adapt their online presence to the new needs of society for content, accessibility, and relevance. While Round did not elaborate further on what this will specifically entail there will be improved navigation and a better online catalogue for sure. The Joslyn saw this need for a change as the museum website is the pre-visit touchpoint that most potential museum visitors get their first impression of the museum with and now want to update it to encourage more engagement with the works beforehand allowing for museum trip planning before they get to the museum itself. Even if the engagement is simply finding a work of art they want to see, looking at a map of the museum to plan what galleries to visit, or finding out which bus stop is close by, the museum website being improved will make a difference in the pre-visit

experience of the visitors. In the past Nancy Round pointed out that the website was designed not to have connections with other websites or pages, this made sense to them for safety and because they didn't want people leaving the museum site to go elsewhere online. Now though they are looking to include links to artists' websites and Instagrams, and the museum's different social media accounts. The website has already been fairly easy to navigate and find the programs or work information a person might be searching for; the museum wants to do better than before.

The museum also had a large exhibition called *Faces from the Interior: The North American Portraits of Karl Bodmer* with community aid from nearby Native American tribes and groups to have their voices heard in this exhibition. The exhibition included four recordings from Native American artists telling their stories and multiple contributed texts from artists, scholars, and elders from the communities Bodmer had visited when making these portraits. The texts are still on the website next to the catalogue of the portrait teaching not just about the portrait but about the history of the people the portrait is painting. The museum sought out people who this exhibition directly related to and asked for their contributions instead of simply presenting the artworks as watercolors from the 1830s by a draftsman on a scientific exhibition. This exhibition was a community effort, it shows how museums have begun cocreating content with the community. It shows the broadening of media on display with the videos, and it shows the expanding of technology in the gallery space with the videos and free online mobile tour audio recordings. The museum is using the technology of the present and the website to engage visitors with the museum content in whatever way works best for them and makes them want to know more.

The Joslyn Art Museum's social media presence on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram present the opportunity for engaging with the community though some are more active than

others. The twitter page has not been updated as recently as the others and has fewer posts than the other two social media sites. The Facebook and Instagram pages have similar or the same posts as one another explaining events in the community, examining artworks from the collections, marketing for classes, and news about the museum. The museum being closed for renovations is clearly stated on each of these platforms some with pictures and the link to the expansion page on the Joslyn Museum website which outlines some of the plan for the new museum and when the museum expects to reopen. The Museum has about 24,000 followers on Facebook, 10,600 on Instagram, and 7,460 on twitter showing that it has a solid following within the community comparable to The Durham Museum (the other local museum also in downtown Omaha). The museum's social media presence is not currently trying to get people into the museum, but they are attempting to keep their audience engaged in art in the city and to participate in programs by showing some of the art that is inspiring and being created. This is seen and explored further later in this paper when examining the programming on offer. These social sites also serve as an announcement board for cultural activities.

At the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art they are working to incorporate newer technologies in their museum to be inclusive, accessible, and to engage with people in the community or abroad. On the website the first thing I found that utilizes technology to reach a wide range of visitors is the smaARTify app which has audio stories and American Sign Language (ASL) videos with a step-by-step guide on how to download the app on your phone. Utilizing the ticket reservation software bodes well for a quick admission process while still allowing for people to buy their tickets in-museum, the access to the online map which also shows accessibility points for handicapped visitors, and the link to the frequently asked questions page all work together on this 'plan your visit' page. This provides a pre-visit experience with a lot of content and

instruction in an attempt to ready the visitor on what to expect. The museum website also provides a content driven page called Nelson-Atkins @ Home showing virtual and in person events that people and families can take part in and a plethora of other resources such as online exhibitions and 3D tours of the galleries provided by the online platform for high-resolution images and videos *Google Arts & Culture*. The museum goer can have an entire museum experience before they go but there is a lot of content to get through if they are just trying to learn about the museum. The website's homepage onwards really tries to bring you in and help you find the thing that you want to do at the museum, it does market itself well with its design, cohesive colors, many pictures, and many links to the pages a visitor might want to find.

The Museum itself also has televisions in the galleries and in the Education hallway to aid in the visitor experience with the TV in the education hallway displaying artworks and advertisements for the Teen arts programs conducted on site. According to Jackie Niekamp the museum offers tablets for certain tours for the guests to experience the art through another media but otherwise the technology seen in the galleries is mainly the multimedia art on display.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum's social media is not the main way of connecting to their audiences but has a strong presence with regular posting. The Facebook page has multiple posts each month with a balance between events, holiday posts, museum marketing, and artistic explorations. They have sign ups to say if people are coming to events and links to their website to register for camps, classes, and programs. There are about 136,000 followers on the page, they have a 4.9 star rating with 13,438 reviews, and they have cohesive branding on some of the posts, but not all. I then looked to the Instagram page to see the museum's presence and they have the same posts as on the Facebook page and are attempting to reach a broader audience but only have about 94,700 followers. The museum is following more people on Instagram though as

they follow 1,243 pages, on Facebook they are only following 73 other pages. The Instagram page also does not seem to be utilizing their ability to have people search for them using hashtags which could benefit them greatly as it can bring in more people. The twitter page is present once more with strong links and similar if not the same posts from their other social media as well as minimal use of hashtags. With only 54,000 followers this social media seems the least impactful of the three even though they are following over 8000 other pages.

The Denver Art Museum's website is obviously carefully curated to entice the visitor to the website to want to see more by starting off showing snippets of the current exhibitions. It has a chat feature to answer frequently asked questions, it has blog posts and classes on the front page, the scroll down main page is expansive, and they have even connected their main page to their Instagram hashtag allowing shared images using the hashtags to show up as a gallery of images on the website so visitors can see the posts they share tagging the museum on the museum's website. They have a lot of their collections available for viewing online with categories to look through and special exhibitions included. Their calendar is more complicated than it seems to be with their short-term events being buried in the 'now on view' sections of this calendar. The *Visit* page is well laid out to explain everything that they feel the potential visitor may need to know. They also included information on parking, public transit, museum guides, tours, and scheduling field trips all on the main page. The website is very full but well categorized under umbrella headings so navigating is not too strenuous. When it comes to technology in the museum Heather Nielsen, The Director of Learning and Engagement, says that there are audio guides like many museums today as well as art making stations in the galleries that can use tech and multimedia materials as well as video displays which are often popular parts of the exhibits. She also brought up that they are working on an *Augmented Reality* (AR)

incubator project that will be introduced but that overall, the museum does not try to be a tech innovator; rather it waits until the technology is trusted and tested before attempting to integrate it. The museum website and what is in the galleries presents the museum as one that wants to be tech friendly but is not going out of its way to utilize technology in new ways.

The social media for the Denver Art Museum is active and varied. When looking at Instagram, Facebook and Twitter we see posts that are designed specifically for their three sites but still share the mission of getting people excited about the museum and connecting them to their events and collections. Their twitter account retweets other people's posts, uses links in their posts back to the museum site, promotes their events like free admission day, and generally tries to connect with their audience regularly. The Facebook page does this and also has videos and events created on the site, there are quite a few more programs and events being promoted. This platform is often used by families and parents so it makes sense that some of their posts seem more directed towards them than the twitter posts. The Instagram page presents similarly to Facebook but with more hashtags and fewer event scheduler elements, though it still has links to the website for that purpose. When speaking with Heather Nielsen she mentioned that education plays a small role in the social media of the museum, they will sometimes create posts but typically the graphics and design and marketing teams control the sites and put out content upon requests. It can be seen in the posts that the social media is not directed as much towards programming as it is events and getting people into the museum.

To get a clearer impression of visitor's opinions and their reasons for liking or disliking the museum, we will also examine some of the online reviews left for these institutions. The reviews I examined are on the two main reviewing sites that come up for the museums, TripAdvisor and Yelp, and are specifically designed to help the prospective viewer decide

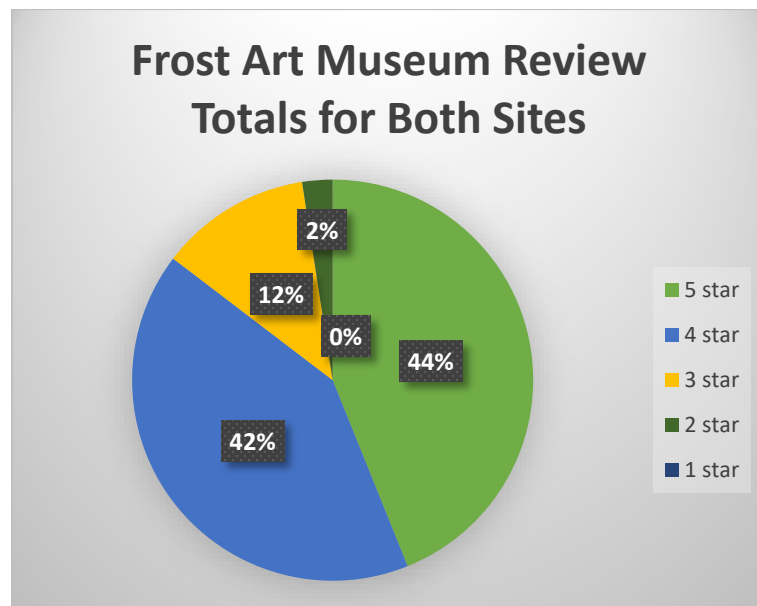
whether to visit or not. Many people, when planning vacations or looking for local attractions to spend a day off at, will look at these sites and others like it to determine if the institution is worth visiting. As the websites I examined are travel sites, there is a lot less community response though there are still plenty of them by people who live in the area, are part of the community, and have memberships to these museums.

Reviews for the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum:

The TripAdvisor website gives the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum 4 out of 5 stars, the rankings standing at 1 star was a terrible experience, 2 stars as a poor experience, 3 as an average experience, 4 as a very good experience, and 5 stars as an excellent experience. The TripAdvisor scores by the public for the Frost stand that over the 45 reviews there were, 19 Excellent, 20 Very Good, 2 Average, 3 Poor, and 1 Terrible. Unfortunately, there are only 32 reviews posted on the website and 14 of the reviews seem to be for the Frost Science Museum. The Frost Science Museum in Miami is large and centered mainly for children and it appears multiple times in the reviews as they share a similar name, though it does have some small art exhibits at times, leading to wrong data on the site. This may lead to negative first impressions by potential visitors if the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum does not do anything to mitigate these reviews. The Frost Art Museum is located on the Florida International University campus and based on the reviews evidence suggests that 18 of the 32 actually belong to the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum. The reviews with details relevant only to the Frost Art Museum give 7 Excellent, 8 Very Good, 2 Average, and 1 Poor. Most positive mentions in the reviews are about how it is small but has good exhibitions, it is free to the public, it offers programs to the community and is partnered for university students to learn there, and it has art connected to the

local community. The negative elements to the reviews mainly pertain to the parking, the size, and number of exhibits.

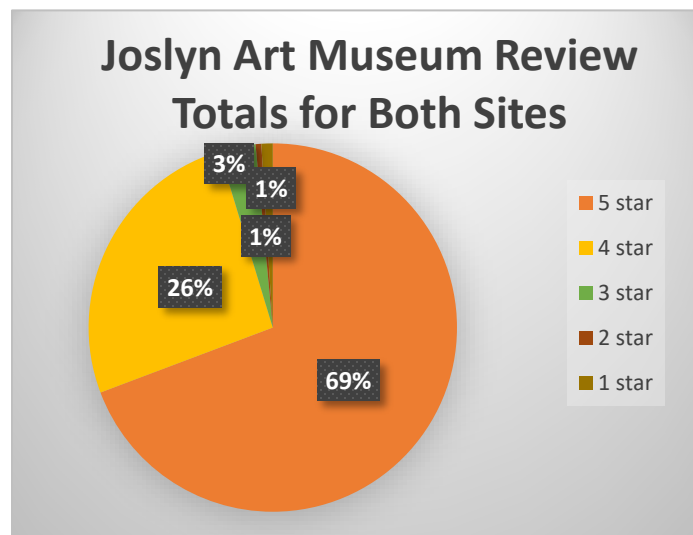
On Yelp the Frost Art Museum averages 4.5 stars out of 5 with 12 five star reviews, 11 four stars, and 3 three stars. The lower star reviews here seemed to be leaning towards the disconnect between the different exhibits in the museum as a whole and the lack of more prominent pieces or works by well-known artists on display. The pleasantness of the staff and beauty of the building were also brought up in the three-star reviews though as the visitors seemed content enough with their experience to come back and see future exhibits. Some of the four star reviews on Yelp also bring up the convenience of the Café on the ground floor of the museum and the children's exploration room in the museum. Two of the four star and one five star review were for the science museum again, the name being so close and the nickname for the museum being the same likely causes a lot of confusion even in as big a city as Miami. We see multiple times in these reviews that even the FIU students responding unaware that the art museum was located on campus. Since the museum partners with the university and has classes which pertain directly to the museum the staff may have to speak to FIU about upping their presence on campus to bring in the audience they supposedly are directly engaged with. Overall, the reviews are very positive towards the museum, but complaints are consistent. The smaller sample size allows for some of the more negative voices to make up a higher percentage in Figure 1 than you may see in Figures 2-4. Throughout the reviews there are also responses from the museum staff telling the reviewer what they are going to try and do to address the issue.

Figure 1: Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum Review Statistics***Reviews for the Joslyn Art Museum:***

When first seeing if you want to visit a place on vacation by looking it up on the internet the first impression of the museum that potential visitors get may be reviews. Based on the TripAdvisor reviews the Joslyn Art Museum is a must-see in Omaha garnering 4.5 stars with multiple complements to the collection and special exhibits. There are 632 Excellent reviews, 231 Very good, 28 Average, 3 Poor, and 6 Terrible, after reading through them I see that for many the people working in the museum and the collection are the parts of the experience they found to be most noteworthy either positively or negatively. Some commented on the layout saying they enjoy the free nature of exploration, others said they wished there was a clear path to follow, the museum is not set up in a narrative form but sectioned into galleries of different regions or time periods of art such as Ancient, European, American, Native American, Postwar & Contemporary, etc.

The Yelp reviews also skew popular with 62 of the 102 reviews being five star, 30 four star, 4 three star, 2 two star, and 4 one star reviews. Once more the focus is placed on the staff and the collection with these reviews, many of the negative ones being in response to feeling like the gallery attendants were unfairly berating their young children and that children weren't welcome at the museum. One reviewer was just upset she can't vape in the museum. Still though, it shows what the community is looking for in a museum, these people felt it worth their while to leave reviews either because they loved the collection and felt welcome in the space, or they felt the collection didn't have any wow-factor and the staff was rude. Round says that the museum's staff and the collection are the two parts of the museum that are their greatest strength, and as a whole the public seems to agree.

Figure 2: Joslyn Art Museum Review Statistics



Reviews for the Nelson Atkins Art Museum:

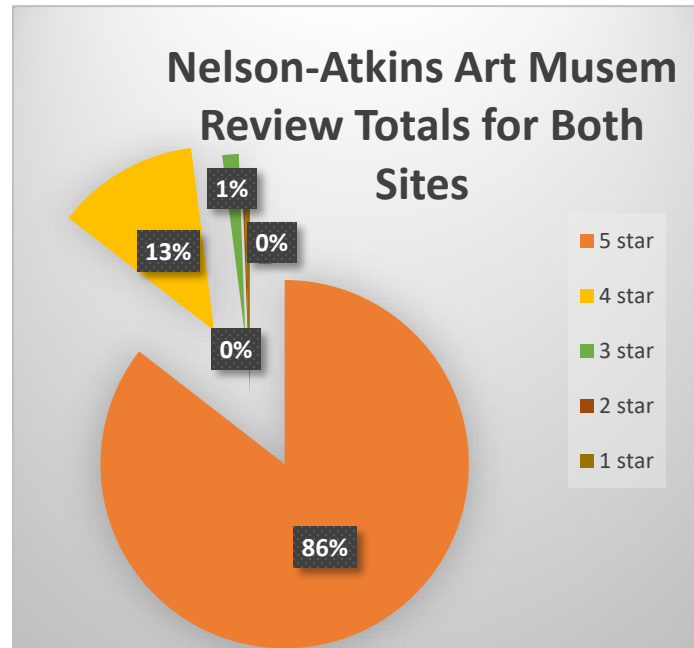
The reviews on TripAdvisor for this Kansas City staple of culture and art greatly outnumber the smaller museums already discussed with 3,306 reviews. Of those, 2,804 are Excellent, 438 are Very Good, 51 are Average, 4 are Poor, and 9 are Terrible. The Terrible and Poor reviews mainly talked about how the museum was difficult to navigate, should be open more days of the week, a couple said the staff was unpleasant and followed their groups too

closely, and they said the museum overall didn't live up to the hype that surrounds it as it is regarded as one of the best in the Midwest. In the Average, Very Good and Excellent categories most of what was said talked about how there is so much to see, so there was some warning about being ready to walk, and that the museum collections were great. There were comments on how convenient the café is in the middle of the museum, even though it closed for COVID-19 the space was still deemed beautiful, and that the gift shop had enough without trying to take up too much of the museum. Multiple reviews comment on how even people who are not 'art people' can find something they enjoy in the museum or lawns. There are also a lot of comments about loving that the museum is free but, as this is a traveler's review site, there is some upset about the expense of the parking garage from those driving in, though most agree that it is worth it to go to the museum. The key phrase we see over and over in these 5 star reviews is 'I can't wait to go back!' The overwhelming majority of reviewers on this site declare the museum a must visit location in the Midwest.

On yelp there are 569 reviews, 508 of which are five star, 46 four star, 5 three star, 2 two star, and 7 one star reviews. The 1 star reviews seemed mainly along the vein of upset because of micromanaging from the staff about their policies and frustration about the visitor being made to do things a certain way in the museum. We saw this on the TripAdvisor reviews as well, they mainly seemed to be around the COVID-19 policies and bag carrying but also included rude staff about closings of the museum and their activities. However, these were just seven of the overall 569 reviews, the 4 and 5 star reviews play out much like the ones on TripAdvisor, focusing on getting to see a lot of amazing, even if not famous, artworks and the fun gardens and lawn spaces. There is the upset about parking costs and the love for the museum being free. Also, there are positive comments for the events that take place, the activities for children, and the

museum is regarded by most commenters as worth going to see or a must see for Kansas City with 86% being the highest grade of reviews possible (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Review Statistics

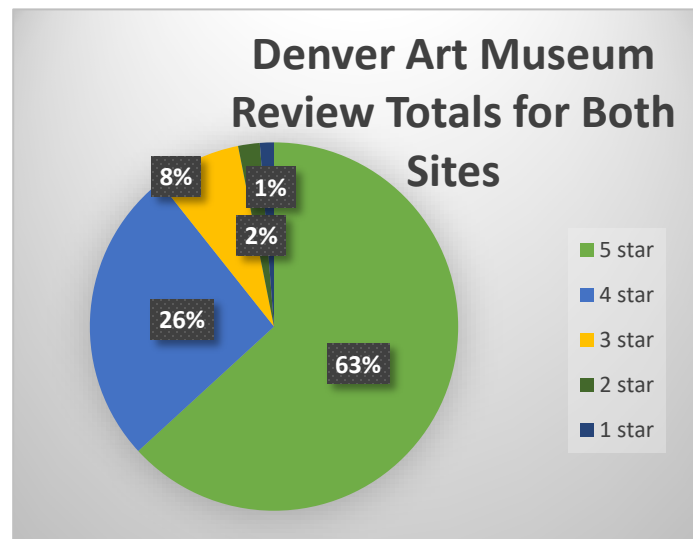


Reviews for Denver Art Museum:

The Denver Art Museum is an institution that is a cultural hub for the capital of Colorado; the TripAdvisor reviews showcase this with 3460 reviews leading to their 4.5 out of 5 star rating. Their 2275 Excellent reviews, 863 Very Good, 246 Average, 48 Poor, and 28 Terrible reviews share the museum's status in the community. The overall consensus drawn from the positive reviews is that there are great art works, it is a great and welcoming museum, their design of where works are in a museum is comprehensible, there is something for everyone, friendly staff, and the museum's interactive components fuel creativity. A lot of the negative reviews come from 2017, 2019, and 2021 when the museum was under major reconstruction efforts leading to much of it being closed down during these times and the people being upset they were not told this explicitly when they purchased tickets. There were other reviews where people did not feel it was worth the money because they were not getting a lot of the 'old art'

that they had wanted to see because the museum has a little from a lot of different art movements and styles. Overall, the feelings are mainly positive about this art museum and its contents on TripAdvisor.

On Yelp there are 595 reviews: 288 five star, 197 four star, 60 three star, 29 two star, and 22 one star. Once more the negative reviews start out discontented with how the museum did not tell them that much of the building was closed during their renovation periods and wondering how they could charge full price for what remained on display. There are also a number of complaints about the gallery attendants following and berating guests for being too close to the artwork, making the experience unpleasant. While many of the negative reviews were older, the more positive reviews vary across the years. There are plenty since they reopened the museum in full with a lot being said about the collections and the traveling exhibits. While there are some comments about the friendly staff in the higher star reviews, most of them are about the museum's collection, the building, and the presentation of their content in the museum. There are a lot of people saying to make sure to go on one of the Museum's free days, while others say it isn't worth it because everyone tries to go on the free days. There are a number of disjointed opinions between those that left good or bad reviews, but as seen in Figure 4 the majority seems to really like the museum and think it worthwhile to visit for multiple hours.

Figure 4: Denver Art Museum Review Statistics***What Effect Does Technology Have Then on the Museum?***

Adapting to technological advancements is necessary for museums who expect to survive in the modern era. The museum's ability to harness technology's potential for the betterment of their collections and community is a large part of the overall success of the museum.

Incorporating apps with audio tours takes the pressure off the museum to provide auditory tours regularly, videos can, for example, explain how a piece was made or the background surrounding it. Movies sharing stories of the people who the art was inspired by and x-rays to see what a work had beneath the surface are other ways that we see technology advancing in museums with new ways of exploring the works for the visitor to engage with. Some, like Heather Nielsen from the Denver art museum, are hesitant to 'jump on the bandwagons' as technology can fail, become more trouble than it is worth, and distract from the collection when not done right. Exhibitions like the Immersive Van Gogh can take away from the source material for some while for others it is the best way they have been able to experience it. Meeting the needs of many by having different ways of engaging with the art is made possible in another way through a

museum's use of technology. Museums will continue adapting and finding new ways to integrate technology into their exhibitions and museum experiences, but it may be a slow process.

The Museum's website can be the first welcome a visitor gets, curating a space that is informative, engaging, and sparks the desire to learn more is paramount to getting people to the museum. Not knowing where to park, lack of accessibility, not knowing what is on display, all of these and more are reasons people posted in their reviews as to why their experience was bad or could have been better. By having a website that presents this information clearly the museum can avoid many of these complaints. The passive nature of websites does not mean they should be static, as seen with the Denver Art Museum specifically they change their main page with their exhibitions and create movement on their page through changing pictures connected through the community via social media. Some people who can only visit the museum for a short while will plan out what paintings they want to see specifically and by having the collections online that is a much more achievable goal. The website is a common ground for museum visitors and is invaluable if done correctly. How would you know that you can't bring a backpack in with you to the Frost Art Museum or that the parking is metered in the nearby parking garage unless you read it on the website? If created and curated incorrectly museum websites can lead to confusion regarding policies, upset regarding parking and entrances, disquiet about what is on display, and displeasure about tours or on-site activities.

Social media and online reviews present the museum to the world in different ways but with similar objectives, to get you to think about the museum from the stance of the one who posted. On social media the posts are done by museum staff members and are trying to provide you with information that will get you thinking about the event, get you to want to visit the museum, or want to connect you to another group in the community. These posts and being able

to post your own experiences and link with the museum are important in the co-creation of museum experiences. Being able to review online also gives the visitor a sense of ownership over their experience and a time to reflect on how they felt and what they saw. Some reviews will be negative, but as seen here if the visitor has a strong collection to engage with, positive interactions with employees, opportunities to interpret and engage themselves, they will have a positive experience at the museum. Reviews are especially important though for the museum itself to examine. Yes, the reviews provide information to the public but they also show areas that the museum is succeeding in and where it is failing. If there are a lot of reviews talking about how the museum gallery attendants were overbearing and rude then maybe more extensive training needs to be done. If the reviews talked about how there wasn't enough information available about what they would be seeing when they came to the museum then maybe the marketing team needs to create materials showing what is on display to be shared at the admission's desk. We also see the recurring things that people say made the experience a pleasant one, if they took the time to write about it in a review then it impacted them beyond the museum and into the post-visit part of their museum experience. This information is important for museums to look at when they make changes because you do not want to lose elements of the museum that people like and enriches most peoples' experiences and want to iron out issues as to what negatively influences peoples' opinions on the museum.

Focus on Public Initiatives and Programs

An immense part of what I have found is important to the modern art museum and education for the public is programming for children and families. Art museums have been hosting their studio classes, bringing in artist events, musicians, elderly programming, hosting community events, and more as an effort to be an integral part of the socio-cultural landscape.

By being the place for these classes, events, and spearheading initiatives of inclusivity and education to happen, art museums work hard to be the hub of culture in their community and change the public's views on learning and museum visit experiences.

The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum is integrated into the university campus and as such has aligned exhibitions and content with courses offered at both the university and other Florida schools. The Museum works to apply learning theory, methodologies relating to the content being taught, visual thinking strategies, and work to create an experience that is student centered according to Machado. *Visual Thinking Strategies* (VTS) is an inquiry-based teaching strategy that has gained popularity in the last 50 years of art education that encourages critical thinking by having students observe independently and present their ideas with evidence, often through discussions with others (Milwaukee Art Museum, 2023). The Museum works closely to make their programming and offerings relating to the exhibits align with their courses and will offer curator guided tours by the curators for students of staff from the university. As the museum is so centered on teaching, and not just for the students, they offer professional development workshops relating to *Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics* (STEAM) teaching as well as offering lesson plans relating to their exhibits for teachers. This can help teachers professionally but also encourages strong ties between the educators in the community and the museum that can lead to more field trips at the museum tailored to the classroom learning happening and the opportunity for engaging workshops.

In efforts to not be an unchanging and static institution, the Frost Art Museum's permanent collections remain on view for two years before rotating through and presenting new materials encouraging people to come back again. This allows for there to be something new regularly so repeat visitors are not necessarily seeing the same things on their visits. Their

programming does not relate only to their permanent collections but includes works from local and emerging artists. These artists create ties within the community as they bring in family and friends from the area reminding them, or letting them know, that the museum is there. The museum also hosts regular events with musicians on their terrace and in their atrium allowing another type of art to fill the museum bringing in people with varying interests. Of course, one of the biggest things they do to keep people coming in the doors and coming back by providing free admission to the museum breaking down that barrier that could prevent people from visiting. The other major strength lies in the museum's education team and their programming.

The Frost Museum education team spends a lot of their time establishing and maintaining programs throughout the year that they use as a tool to keep themselves relevant to the area and encourage people to come for their different programs relating to their children, their interests, or their values. The museum also worked hard to respond to community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic's quarantining by providing virtual programs and providing art supplies for at-home art classes for schools. Their programming within the past 5 years has been focused on helping the students and community continue on their learning paths and maintain a sense of stability in difficult circumstances as well as finding some respite, relief and self-care through the museum's programs. Machado says that in an effort to remain relevant they have been adding more virtual programming, in-person programs, and finding a balance for the needs of the audience and abilities of the museum. The Frost is active in their community and with community partners as they have young adult art clubs, community service opportunities for teenagers, elderly adult residential homes activity days, and student art shows. Reaching the high school-aged students provides a pool of people bringing in family and friends to see their shows and what they are working on while fueling their creative spirit and also providing them a strong

foundation for a life-long love of artistic expressions. Providing these types of programming the museum expands its audience while providing valuable social and cultural enrichment for the community.

Beyond connecting to the local community art museums have to try and connect to museums across the US in order to keep up with industry best standards and practices, especially educators as the field is constantly changing and evolving, while also trying to relate to education within schools. As previously mentioned, the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum includes STEAM learning presenting an interdisciplinary method of engaging with their visitors and staying in line with the needs of schools and the standards allowing for field trips to meet multiple grade requirements. The Consortium of National Arts Education Associations defines the interdisciplinary teaching method as enabling students to “identify and apply authentic connections between two or more disciplines and/or to understand essential concepts that transcend individual disciplines” (The Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 2002). The choice to include STEAM programming enables educators to create these connections between disciplines and help students to find ways of learning that work best for them. The Frost Museum continuously participates in conferences, attends and hosts lectures, and works hard to learn about what they can do to be the best version of their museum. Machado also says they reach out and communicate with other institutions to gain insight and perspective on any issues they may have relevant input regarding. Machado says that the museum’s leadership team tries to keep up with best standards by constantly learning and by sharing new trends or findings that are consistent in supporting the museum’s mission and relates to their audiences.

The Joslyn Art Museum has long been a place for public learning and education at large, it was built by Sarah Joslyn after her husband's death as a monument to him and to give back to the city in a way that would benefit its citizens (Beal, 17). The museum's efforts to be a cultural space for the public regardless of personal barriers is seen in their decision to make admittance to the museum free to the public as of 2013 only charging for the traveling exhibitions and asking for donations from the community. The museum also has a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion board which advises the museum and assesses what it does in an effort to make the museum truly inclusive to the public no matter the person's background, and to make sure the museum is put together in a thoughtful way that is not hurtful or disrespectful to marginalized groups. As discussed earlier one way they have been doing this is their last exhibition the *Faces of the Interior* by Karl Bodmer that had the museum reaching out and recording stories and histories from the Native American community members.

The museum has been partnering in the community as part of its efforts to stay present in the city's cultural canon despite being closed for the pandemic and then renovations. Community partnerships can help connect the museum to its potential visitors, creating new connections and reminding the public of the museum's presence. Joslyn has multiple ongoing partnerships with other arts and culture centers in Omaha such as Omaha Public Libraries, Filmstreams, the Omaha Symphony, Millwork Commons, and Maha Music Festivals. These are different media of artworks than the Joslyn will sometimes deal with in the museum itself, and allows for branches of art to be shared with their audience while also bringing new viewers to the museum. On the website the people of Omaha and those just passing through can check out the 'Joslyn Around Town' page showcasing some of the upcoming events and opportunities that people can take part in while the Joslyn is closed at these partner sites. The website is a crucial component here as it

is the main location where people learn about the museum's closure and other activities they can do instead that still allow people and families to be involved in the art community in Omaha even while they can't go to the museum.

The benefits of offsite programming have increased since the museum's closure and involves meeting with the public in their spaces and will likely continue after the museum reopens. Having connections at other studios in the city and the Museum's presence at other types of events is one way the museum is trying to remain relevant and connect with a community even if they never set foot in the building itself. When the museum reopens though, they want to bring even more programming in, as made evident by the additional two studios being made and extra community and lecture spaces in the designs. Museums having more space for larger works and works of different mediums has been seen across the US in museums such as the Whitney, who rebuilt when they needed more space for their contemporary works and include more social spaces for the community such as a restaurant, lecture rooms, theater, library, etc. (Saumarez-Smith, 2021). The museum is also creating connections through the Art bridges program. Round explained that while the museum is closed some of its collections are traveling to other museums to be temporary exhibitions at smaller museums. This is beneficial to these museums as they are getting access to a good collection of curated works of art, and it is equally good for the Joslyn as they are getting to see their collections being presented in a new context through another curator's lens to see what connections they make and how they display the works.

The Joslyn's choice to expand and grow their services and programs is seen in their mission statement, "The Joslyn Art Museum collects, preserves and interprets the visual arts of the highest quality, fostering appreciation and enjoyment of art for the benefit of a diverse

audience,” (Joslyn Art Museum, 2023). The museum can only be the highest quality by keeping up with the needs of their visitors and evolution of the museum to have more art for their audience to engage with. The museum’s vision statement is to “be cherished and respected as a premier art museum.” In their action plan for the 2020-2022 years the museum’s strategic priorities were to “commit to art, engage the community at large, increase relevance and reach, and build capacity and enhance growth,” (Joslyn Art, 2023). The whole plan is available on their website allowing the public access to the museum’s thinking and hope for development while also allowing people to come to their own conclusions if the museum is reaching the goals set forth in the strategic action plan.

The museum attempts to keep up with industry standards being put forth by other museums and the *American Alliance of Museums* (AAM) through interdepartmental communication and correspondence with other museums. The staff have leadership meetings regularly allowing the education, curatorial, admissions, and other branches of the museum’s staff to collaborate and discuss new information within the museum to continue the mission. Round says that some other ways they communicate with museum professionals outside their museum include some members of the staff attend the annual AAM convention, some participate in the *National Endowment for the Arts* (NAEA) peer groups, and she takes part in *Forum for Leadership in Art Museum Education* (FLAME) discussions. The Museum is also taking part in the LUCE foundation museum partnership opportunity to create what is essentially a mentorship symbiotic relationship with another museum, in this case the Minneapolis Art Museum.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art uses a lot of programming led by their adept education, interpretation, and learning teams to engage with their community. While speaking to two members of the Learning and Engagement team specifically focused on programs, Jackie

Niekamp the Manager of Community and Access Programs and Sarah Hyde Schmiedeler the Senior Manager of Community Programs, I learned more about all of the programs the museum puts out, the goals of the museum's programming, and what they have been doing to be better. Learning and engagement is a huge part of what they do at the Nelson-Atkins and with a combination of teaching artists and arts educators on staff, it is a unique mix of part- and full-time team members but they are all dedicated to the museum's goals and plans.

The programs Niekamp and Schmiedeler informed me of included their healthy aging programs for older adults, the refugee and new American Citizenship class, and the strong teen programming. There is also programming for after-school and summer as well as field trips, children's art classes, at home art, and workshops for educators. The programs for healthy aging are grant funded programs that allow for older community members to create and discuss art on site and at different locations facilitated by a museum engagement staffer. The English Language Learners and Citizen Preparation Classes offer the ability to connect art, history, and language together in the museum with guidance from educators. This is another interesting interdisciplinary approach to teaching as it is using the art to help people learn about history and government. This interdisciplinary approach to teaching to help new Americans through art while also creating a space for them in the museum so they feel confident in their ability to come back and share with others. While it is much more likely now for museums to have maps, guides, and tours in more than one language available these programs for elderly and non-native English speakers cater to the needs of the community in a way I have not seen as much. While considering the Nelson-Atkins Museum does not have a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion board they are making significant efforts to promote these things in their museum. The multi-language tours and guides, the promoting of community voices that had not being heard from, and training

of the staff, Niekamp and Schmeidler say the museum is trying to take the right steps to be as inclusive as possible and that these efforts are a part of the museum's strategic plan. While not all museums have the DEI and Access boards we are seeing more and more, like the Nelson-Atkins, which are taking steps towards it such as training programs for all staff members regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion.

When asked about the big initiatives the museum has been putting into action in the last five years, Niekamp and Schmiedeler talked about how during the pandemic there was designated exhibitions for local artists to be put on display and they took the time of the closure to talk to the community about what they wanted to see. They specifically reached out to different artists and community members whose voices may not have been heard in the past such as people of color and those with different sexuality and genders. The opportunity the pandemic provided allowed the museum as a whole to work towards more cultural equity and getting artists' voices heard across the board. In trying to connect to the community they redid their strategic plan recently, and revamped it with the goal to be more culturally responsive. They hired outside contacts for audience studies of profiles looking into how they got people into the museum, who came, why these people were coming, and how to be responsible, effective and responsive to the community.

The museum has always had events and fairs with different social and cultural groups designed for families, individuals, groups and more to come to the museum and feel welcomed and they are beginning to pick these programs and events back up after the pandemic's impacts. A lot of the programming was virtual, and some still is, with programs for aging adults and organizations that are abroad getting programming from the Nelson-Atkins. Art classes and engagement are a huge part of what they do with their education studios mainly gearing towards

teen programs. Post pandemic closures, many of the big cultural festivals have been more subdued but there are still musical events, virtual events, and they are ramping back up to more on site in person programming. The ability to present programming on the lawns during the pandemic allowed for a lot more interaction while still maintaining public safety. The museum programming has a lot to offer that is keeping the people of Kansas City and surrounding areas very engaged regardless of age. While a lot of museums will put a lot of focus onto their youth and family programs the Nelson-Atkins programs for healthy aging are well funded through grants, the Citizen preparedness class helps people new to the country, the after-school and summer programs provide safe spaces for the community's children too. All of this helps to foster a continued relationship between the visitor and the museum, but also their steady presence within the community.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum sends its employees to conferences, such as those of the AAM, as a part of staying relevant and to continue learning and growing as an institution. They also participate in the *Museum Educators Round table* (MER) and NAEA discussions to continue to familiarize themselves with new methods and practices in the museum fields. The museum will also send its employees on research trips to other institutions in the US to see how others present information and create community connections. Niekamp and Schmiedeler spoke about how cocreation, community engagement, and discussion between museum professionals is how their museum will remain successful. They say that a good museum has something for everyone, not just the upper echelon of society, and can be a place of exploration and excitement about learning.

The Denver Art Museum has been taking initiatives to better their connections with the community. The museum's Learning and Engagement Director Heather Nielson says they have

been working hard to cocreate with the community and to bring the community's thoughts into the museum through discussions with community leaders. The museum reaches a wider audience through bilingual interpretations, programing, and maps, and making great efforts to focus on things that matter to people and covering modern issues. The museum encourages talks about subjects that can make people feel powerful, enraged, inspired, and attempts to instigate conversations and contemplation through this. Nielson uses movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), George Floyd protests, and issues raised in the pandemic, as an example of the topics they have created community engagement within the art museum about. This allows for the museum to harness the public's need to have a place to explore their feelings and open discussion about the social and cultural things affecting them.

The Museum also connect to the community through school trips, high school exhibitions, healthy aging programs, 4-5 year old development programs, art activities that are boxed and sent out called *Art at Hand*, local artist programs, and partnership with Center on Colfax. These programs reach people from ages 4 and up and offer different types of activities; tours, in person programming, activities at home, and programming relating to personal identity at the Center of Colfax for LGBTQ+ individuals. This provides plenty of opportunities for people to find a program that works for them to keep them engaged with the museum. After quarantining and closing due to COVID-19 the museum is still getting back to their previous programming, Nielson says, with school trips being one of the longest to regenerate. The programs that they began during the pandemic though for those homebound individuals are going to continue for now but the museum is actively trying to get reengaged with the community and see how needs have changed and thus how they will have to adapt.

The Museum wants to be a place of education and engagement and as such has partnerships with community partners. They partner with the Latino Alliance, work with councils such as the Indigenous Advising Council, have Youth advising Groups, and have grants for creative aging groups and programming. These partnerships allow for different demographics to take part in the shaping of the museum in an inclusive way such as the way a Diversity Equity and Inclusion board might. The Learning and Engagement team including Nielson support the programs, events, and discussions in an effort to provide a more diverse perspective presence within the museum. The museum also has ASL interpreters available upon request and some docents are trained for special needs groups providing another group the ability to be present in the museum though Nielson says they are still working to get more low vision audio description and tactile learning tools into the museum. The Denver Art Museum wants people who come to feel like there is a place for them to explore art through discussion and interaction and uses their community connections to bring in more people to do just that.

In order to keep up with the art museum industry the Denver Art Museum engages with colleagues from other museums and will visit to interpret for themselves how they would engage visitors. The museum utilizes the AAM network, their city is hosting the 2023 convention and a number of lectures are happening at their museum, to keep up with trends in the museum industry at large. The Learning and Engagement directors participate in FLAME, the museum takes part in the National Association of Interpreters, and the individual staff members read and share research themselves. When another museum has a similar mission, exhibition, values, the Denver team wants to investigate presentation of relating materials so they will also visit the other museums.

The museums have similar programs and some offer programs others don't, but they are all focused on creating learning opportunities for people to engage with the museum and their collection beyond exploring the galleries or interactive spaces. Each of these museums hosts school trips and has student exhibitions, they provide learning outside the classroom through these programs and create positive experiences while young relating to the art museum. Both Denver and Nelson-Atkins museums have healthy aging programs encouraging older generations to come and gives retired individuals the chance to learn and grow in their spare time. They both also host major cultural events on their campuses as they have the space and community connections to groups for their events to have significant cultural relevance. The Denver Art Museum and Joslyn both have programs with a nearby center, Joslyn has the Kent Bellows program and Bemis Center while Denver has the Center on Colfax. These community sites of artistic exploration and personal expression create opportunities to reach other demographics and encourage people to not feel alienated by the art museums due to age, gender, sexual orientation, etc. These types of programming and the ability to reach into the community and find people to partner with and share the love of art and creating builds a strong foundation for museums as a cultural and social institution as well as up visitation and repeat visitors.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This case study sought to examine how museum initiatives are engaging their audience in person and online while answering the questions of:

1. How are museums creating interactive and social experiences for their visitors?
2. How are museums keeping up with changing technologies and utilizing their online presence?
3. How are museums being conscientious about the needs of the community?
4. How are the museums attaining desired cultural and societal relevance in the current landscape of America?

This study sought to understand some of the current museum practices as well as to consider how have museums adapted to connect with and broaden their audiences. If one museum is getting a lot of attention because of the initiatives they have put into place then the information can benefit other museums if shared. We cannot let museums fall into disrepair and close, it would be detrimental to society as they offer a place for people to come and explore the world, view great art, and spark their curiosity. The museum visitor is a broad category, some people go to museums for dates, for social gatherings, to take field trips, go to paint, for home-schooling practical exploration, to be inspired, and for many other reasons. There is no one type of person who goes to a museum, and as such, museums have to have a broad spectrum of strategies to engage with their audiences. Art museums are adapting to modern times through initiatives that change how museums function, they move away from the ‘stand and view’ in a formal museum environment and through modern technology and psychological understanding of learning are creating new best practices.

The art museum's shifting mission is gradual, it is becoming a more interactive and social experience oriented, utilizing some new technologies, though not always to the fullest extent, and connecting to their local communities and museum industry communities. Museum initiatives to engage with their audience in person, online, and within the community have produced art museums that have interactive experiences for visitors, online presences on social media to draw potential visitors in, websites that provide content pre-visit and post visit, and increased programming and community partnerships. A study conducted by Gensler in 2014-2015 has shown that across the United States museums are becoming more interactive and self-directed. We can see that through the interactive rooms and activities in galleries, self-guided audio tours, and apps which allow for tailored museum art exploration experiences and increased programming both on and off-site (Yamazaki, Murrell, et. al, 2015). The study also says that museums will become even more community focused and thus their design will have more public spaces cultivating a welcoming environment for the visitor. We see this in spades as these museums create and maintain connections in their community, host events such as the Nelson-Atkins cultural events held on their lawns, and the Joslyn Art Museum's renovations having dedicated significant space to the welcoming front entrance and communal spaces within the museum.

The museums in this case study are all taking steps towards the future by instituting initiatives setting guidelines to produce positive outcomes for the museum, the best practices. The Patricia and Phillip Frost, Joslyn, and Denver Art Museum all have designated interactive rooms which allow for hands-on explorative learning, but the Nelson-Atkins instead focuses on their on-site interactive gallery elements and museum educator led activities. All of the museums

see that having interactive and hands-on activities helps to create excitement about the works on display.

Museums' designs are trending towards a visitor experience hospitality mentality. The Museums have gift shops branded with their marketing, they house restaurants and cafes to turn a visit into an all-day experience, their spaces are not just for education, appreciation, and contemplation but also for discussion, cultural events, and social events. The art museum is not a repository for objects but a place of socio-cultural and artistic exploration. Education is a huge part of it; the programs are what feeds people into the museum to help their learning journey.

When I worked at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, I got to see these evolutions in effect everyday through their interactive room and take along activities in the museum. Many times, parents or children would come up to me and tell me about how they loved the space, how they saw that specific thing upstairs as well and got to engage with it directly down in the Art Works room devoted to exploration. By creating those connections between the galleries and a space where children could play and create on their own, we had so much excitement about the art and blooming curiosity in creating on their own. The Joslyn Art Museum as a whole is working very hard to stay culturally and socially relevant in the changing landscape of what it is to be a museum today. 50 years ago an art museum in Nebraska did not have spaces dedicated for children to interact and explore their own creativity, it had studio art classes to understand how to make art. The Museum of 20 years ago would not have had social media and a website nor someone dedicating a part of their day to manage and post on it, programs were written in the newspaper, printed on fliers on community boards, spread by word of mouth, or sometimes advertised on TV. The museum choosing to actively promote diversity, equity, and inclusion as a part of their decision-making process to promote a more diverse and accessible museum is

something that has become a greater focus especially with the 2020 protests after the death of George Floyd. There are many ways the Joslyn art Museum, and other art museums like it, are attempting to step into the future and meet the needs of society, these methods are just the beginning.

Best practices:

Following the idea of the blue-sky exercise from Walhimer's *Designing Museum Experiences* (2022) what could the future of Art Museums look like based on the information provided by the best practices exemplified in this case study? The blue-sky exercise looks at how an institution could be designed without restrictions, and I am applying it to the ideal art museum of the future relevant to what I have discovered doing this case study uncovering best practices. Firstly, as evident by the overwhelming support of the museums which are free in their online reviews and the saddened or negative responses for the museum which charged admission, the museum of the future would offer free admissions regardless of age or state of residence. The museum would be connected to the community in a way that is not intrusive but provides a space for discussion and exploration of the self, society, and the world.

The museum would be universally designed meaning there are equitable products and environments as seen by the number of assists seen in museums such as visual, auditory, foreign language, which could be a barrier as well as the presence of low-sensory days and programming for those with special needs and special needs trained docents. The collections and exhibitions would facilitate powerful, factual, intentional, theatrical, clear, concise, life changing experiences between visitors and museum collections. A hospitality slanted framework prioritizing safety, fun, then learning treating the learning as a result of the engaging fun the visitor participates in. We see this in the case study though the interactive rooms, the ideal interactive spaces dedicated

for the visitor to be able to have the space to create art with some guided projects, some local artist contributions, and something for every age of student. There will also be places for respite such as a café or restaurant on the campus and gardens, a library, a lecture hall, and an auditorium or performance space providing a platform for social and cultural events. The Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum for example had social spaces and a lecture hall which provided social spaces for community and visitors to gather, discuss, and experience art together.

When it comes to programming for the public there would be programs to be done at home, programs led virtually to participate in live or after the fact, on site programming for 4–6-year-olds, outdoor space for children and families to explore and touch. Based on the Nelson-Atkins museum's success in having people engage with the museum in cultural events on the lawn having a community garden on the campus of the art museum could lead to interdisciplinary arts learning relating to agriculture and biology as well as drawing in more members of the community who would work and maintain the community garden. The docents would be trained on visual thinking strategies to help facilitate discussions and personal interpretations within the tours and programming in the galleries. There would be a strong website that is not overly crowded with a clear 'Plan your Visit' page which has a map of parking and the museum's galleries, options for ways to get to the museum for those that don't drive, and a calendar of programs and events at the museum. The website would also have distinct pages for education, school trips, and specialty programing. This would provide visitors with a pre-visit experience that take a lot of the stress of planning the visit and spreads it out so it does not all have to be figured out once at the site.

The technology in the museum would be used in aid of the visitor experience, it would not be the experience itself. The museum would have an app that would provide insight into the

artist and the narrative of the piece without telling you how to interpret the work allowing for personal exploration and interpretation similar to the smARTify app the Nelson-Atkins Museum uses. There would be explorative technologies in the interactive spaces in the museum such as the painting screens in the Joslyn Art Museum. There would be mixed media in the galleries and exhibitions but also in a museum space where the tweets, hashtags, and Facebook posts referencing the museum would be able to be on display such as the section on the Denver Art Museum Website. This provides the cocreation of experiences at the museum, though there would need to be some monitoring of content posted by the public. There would be a space in the museum for local artists to constantly be on rotating display and space for local high school artists and students in the museum's art programs to put their works on display in person or digitally as the Nelson-Atkins Museum does. The museum would have some of the more advanced technologies but would not focus their efforts on creating experiences using only technology but rather as a tool for further exploration, like using an x-ray to look at the different layers of a painting and encourage discussion about artists and how people paint rather than something like the immersive Van Gogh Exhibition that shuffles the viewer through the technologically produced visual exploration of the artist's painting style.

The museum of the future has a community, education, and experiential focus but still relies heavily on the strength of their collection and exhibitions; every museum I spoke to talked about their collection when I asked about the strengths of their museum. The art on display is still the core of the museum even if it isn't the main draw for all visitors, they may be there for their child to go to a class, because their date wanted to see a specific work of art, or some other reason but whatever the reason is, the art on display is what they are interacting with when on site or viewing the online catalogue. The museum of the future's collection, programming, online

presence, and on-site interactive elements work together to create an unforgettable and unique to the person experience for every visitor to the museum leaving a lasting impression sparking the individual's creativity and curiosity.

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