



# How to make a Smart Museum

## PART I: THE MUSEUM PROPOSITION

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## The Museum Proposition

Within these pages are excerpts from propositions put forth during a panel discussion the Smart Museum of Art hosted as part of our 40th anniversary How to Make a Smart Museum program series on October 23, 2014.

The event brought together René de Guzman, Carroll Joynes, Lisa Junkin Lopez, Faheem Majeed, and Elizabeth Merritt, a group of cultural stewards, producers, and activists. They were asked to address the question:

**“What is the one thing that must sit at the heart of an engaged art museum?”**

As part of their propositions some of the speakers chose to contribute objects to our How to Make a Smart Museum installation in GalleryX. In the installation you can see the “Panda Keys” from the Hull-House dining hall, Faheem Majeed’s contribution; the “SmartGlove” that Elizabeth Merritt wore during her visit to our galleries; and you can listen to Lisa Junkin Lopez’s audio piece, a fictional Hull-House Museum voicemail recording that shows the multifaceted nature of the work of their museum. The propositions in this booklet expand on these ideas and why the panelists chose these objects.

As you consider the individual propositions presented here, we invite you to raise questions, challenge the dialogue, and respond with your own proposition. Let’s address critically that which we believe is the most essential work for the future success of museums. The nature of a museum’s success is perhaps a slippery thing that you’ll likely need to define for yourself.

—Notes—

“Hello.”

“What strikes your interest?”

“Oh, did you know we had this?”

René de Guzman  
**Public Service**

## Public Service

The future presents an existential question to museums: are they public spaces for general audiences or are they private spaces for specialists? How a museum imagines itself relative to this question has profound effects on what a museum does and how it presents itself.

At the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA), this question reared its head during the rewriting of our collecting plan, a document that may be one of the most important things a museum can make. A collecting plan provides guidelines for what is taken in and what is let go of. It includes rationale for why this and not that. And the “why” grows out the question of “who” the collection is for.

For a range of reasons, OMCA has made a long term, primary commitment to general audiences. This has to do with the make up of our community and where we see areas of highest potential based on our strengths and appeal as a multi-faceted organization that offers art, history, and natural sciences.

It also relates to how we see museums as opposed to archives or research centers. The latter sees themselves as a resource first for those who already know a thing or two about what they are seeking. On the other hand, serving a general audience requires you to become an active facilitator for enlightenment and excitement for knowledge and cultural experience.

Facilitation involves skills and attitudes normally not part of museum personalities of the past. OMCA has built evaluation and research capabilities, and staffs our galleries with Gallery Guides whose job is to provide a welcoming presence in our spaces. Both allow us to understand our visitors and serve them better.



One of my earliest projects at OMCA had my office moved into the gallery where I reported and did work as usual. This unusual arrangement highlighted the changes that I see as the future of an engaged museum. It brought an element of the museum normally assigned away from the public (myself, a curator) in dialogue with visitors.

On a daily basis, I conducted work in relationship to those I served, saying:

“Hello.”

“What strikes your interest?”

“Oh, did you know we had this?”

“You’re welcome, thanks for coming, and see you again.”

**René de Guzman**

Senior Curator of Art, Oakland Museum of California

—Notes—



“Engagement means that the museum will provide clear and evident opportunities for each visitor...”

Carroll Joynes

**Multiple Avenues of Engagement**

## Multiple Avenues of Engagement

“What is the one thing that must sit at the heart of an engaged museum?”

I am approaching this question from the point of view of someone who has spent the last several years studying the building of arts facilities across the country—all of them participants in an enormous building boom that consumed some \$23 billion dollars of private and public funds over a twenty-four year span (a number proportionate to building both hospitals and schools in the same period). Some of these were very successful, some much less so; some are now thriving, and some are hanging on by a thread. Success often needs to be determined over a longer rather than a shorter trajectory.

My intersection with the notion of engagement comes not from inside a particular institution, but rather from interviewing those who lead cultural institutions and who make the decisions that shape mission, deliver on that mission, ensure sustainability, and decide the role the institution is going to play in the communities in which it resides.

The term engaged, in relation to a museum, has at least two meanings:

1) Taking the notion seriously, means that the museum has at the heart of its mission the goal of its being engaged—at all levels—with those who come through its doors, not just students, faculty, staff, and members of the immediate community. In a city that is rapidly changing, and in the transformative digital environment which we now inhabit, the Smart, like all museums, can have a broader reach to a more varied audience than in the past.

2) The idea that the museum will provide clear and evident opportunities for each visitor, either in person or online, to find multiple avenues to engage with what the museum is doing in terms of both its exhibitions and its programming. In other words, it offers the potential for a multi-faceted relationship to develop with a wide spectrum of people who want to interact with what the museum offers.

In trying to determine what stands at the core of an engaged museum, it helps to realize that expectations of what a museum is, and what it should provide, and for whom, are all undergoing seismic changes.

What is the definition of an engaged museum going forward for Smart Museum of Art as it looks to the next few decades?

Given that it is not possible for a small museum to be all things to all people, the Smart, as a University museum that is partially a classroom, and a place for research, needs to play to its strengths. This means having a curatorial staff who are able to connect with the museum's various and evolving constituencies, while at the same time remaining intellectually rigorous. The intellectual and creative resources at the University of Chicago are both wide and deep, and they need to be called upon regularly.

Simultaneously, as we watch the (slow) death of wall cards and printed texts as explanatory devices, careful thought needs to be given to how exactly the curator stays connected to these various audiences, all while trying to ensure that exhibitions and programs remain both accessible and rigorous. Keeping in mind that artists speak to us in visual languages that are sometimes hard to understand, the challenge for the curatorial staff becomes even greater when you acknowledge the wide spectrum of

experience and knowledge of the museum's audiences. It is certainly not easy balancing rigor and accessibility, but it is possible to do.

In conclusion, I would say that more than anyone else, a gifted and imaginative curator, as the interface with the various audiences, holds the pivotal position in the museum.

What will result, if all of this is successful, is a museum that all these audiences buy into, and take on as their own – to visit, to participate in, and to support. Not all the time, for everyone, but in general. The museum, in addition to being an intellectual resource for faculty, students and staff, will be experienced as an institution for which a key part of its mission will be to respond to the evolving interests and needs of a much broader community.

**Carroll Joynes**

Senior Fellow, Cultural Policy Center,  
The University of Chicago

**FINAL REPORT** JUNE 2012

## **SET IN STONE**

**BUILDING AMERICA'S NEW GENERATION  
OF ARTS FACILITIES, 1994-2008**

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**CHICAGO**



**CULTURAL POLICY CENTER**  
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—Notes—

“What is the one thing you could do to fix it?  
Go Do that thing.”

Lisa Junkin Lopez

**Playing an Active Role**

## Playing an Active Role

When Jane Addams founded Hull-House in 1889, the settlement became a receiving room for Chicago's ills: bathing children, teaching English, assisting with housing needs, and much more. But many people don't know that Hull-House also displayed and loaned artworks to community members, opened a museum with an expressly social mission, and offered a robust art education program for more than 60 years. Hull-House was originally intended to be a cultural space for immigrants to find "uplift" and encouragement among the challenging conditions of the near west side, but Addams and her fellow residents soon learned that there are barriers to culture, including hunger, homelessness, and disease. Hull-House adapted to meet these needs without losing sight of their cultural aims, and it is this holistic and flexible approach that I believe museums must return to in the 21st century.

There may be a wide chasm between Addams' approach and the work of some museums today. Walter Benjamin has reminded us that "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism." Museums, of course, are fully implicated in this statement, and any museum studies student knows that museums are inexorably tied to imperialist values. I am not certain that we can atone for our field's sordid past. But as we look to the future of the field, let's remember that our history isn't just about the universal survey museum and its exploits. It also contains examples of small community-based museums. If the field as a whole is to make progress regarding its ethical considerations, then we must look to these sites to guide our collective future.

I wish I could offer you a Magic 8 ball for how large museums could model themselves on smaller, more engaged ones. Instead, I offer the words of Michel Martin, a



prominent African American journalist who says, “What is the one thing you could do to fix it? Go do that thing.” So let’s imagine what museums could do.

Some museums have taken serious the mandate to respond to current events:

In the wake of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, the St. Louis Museum held a forum for several hundred people that was facilitated by a national dialogue expert. The program was described as creating a “safe space for young people to speak their minds and older adults to listen.”

Some museums have tried to meet local needs directly:

The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis has created an Access Pass that allows local families qualifying for food stamps or income assistance to visit for only \$1 per person.

Some museums are able to leverage their resources to support important organizing campaigns through education and direct action:

The International Sites of Conscience, a coalition of historical sites and cultural organizations addressing past atrocities and human rights issues, is training Syrian media professionals to raise awareness on the role of the media in conflict and post-conflict situations, provide basic training on key transitional justice concepts and highlight the role of memorialization in conflict and post-conflict settings.

In the future, could museums use their sites to provide not only public forums for social issues, but also direct support? What would need to change for this to be possible? Remember that some sites are already finding

ways to do this: for years the Monterrey Bay Aquarium has advocated for environmental policies. The Wing Luke Museum has protested businesses that proliferate racist images. We need to ask what is keeping art museums from this kind of work.

Cassie Chin, the Deputy Executive Director of the Wing Luke Museum in Seattle, once said to me, “someone once told me that in time I would feel ‘confident and comfortable’ in my work. In 20 years at the museum I have never felt confident, nor have I felt comfortable. But I don’t want to.

That discomfort is how I know that I’m doing good work.” Perhaps the thing that is at the heart of the socially engaged museum is this productive tension.

It seems that Addams felt the same. I will share with you her thoughts on the nature of settlement houses, 125 years ago and invite you to apply them to museums today:

“The only thing to be dreaded in the Settlement is that it loses its flexibility, its power of quick adaptation, its readiness to change its methods as its environment may demand. It must be open to conviction and must have a deep and abiding sense of tolerance. It must be hospitable and ready for experiment.”

**Lisa Junkin Lopez**

Interim Director, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum

**Lisa Junkin Lopez**

American

***Fictional Hull-House Museum Voicemail  
Recording***

2014

Audio Recording

Gift of the creator for the “How to Make a Smart  
Museum” installation

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What is at the heart of the socially engaged  
museum?

The heart of a socially engaged museum might  
beat a little bit faster. This audio piece exposes  
the Hull-House Museum’s rapid inner pulse—our  
complex efforts to serve diverse communities—that  
sets a rhythm for the entire institution. This pulse  
is generally invisible to the public, which sees only  
the stoic facade of an historic house.

—Notes—

“Engagement is dialogue”

Elizabeth Merritt

**Active Listening**

## Active Listening

What is the one thing that must sit at the heart of an engaged art museum?

In the future, when an art museum becomes engaged to a visitor, pledging its heart and soul, the core of that relationship will be active listening. “Engagement” is dialogue, with the visitor responding to what the art, the artist, the museum staff have to say, and the museum in turn using its human and digital senses to observe the visitor’s behavior, body language, emotions, and to reflect, restate and build on those reactions.

Rather than directing all attention to itself, the museum will be “we-oriented,” modifying its responses based on verbal and non-verbal feedback from the people inhabiting its space. Exploring a museum will be active and interactive, offering both high-tech and low-tech methods for each member of the public to control and personalize his or her experience.

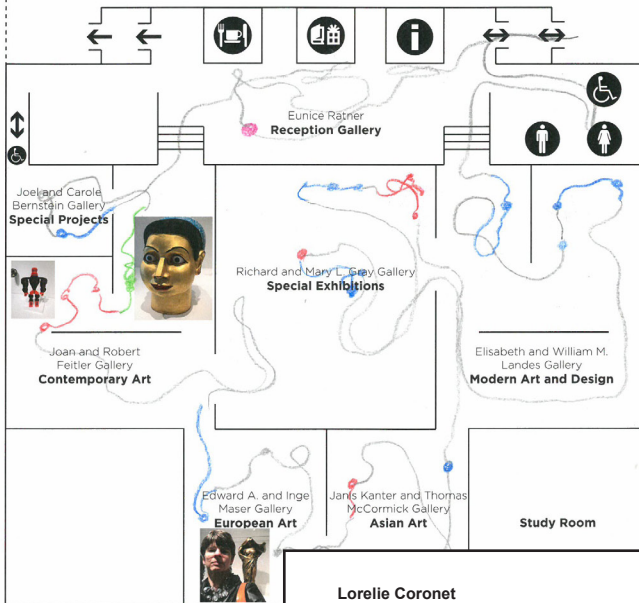
**Elizabeth Merritt**

Founding Director, Center for the Future of Museums

Elizabeth Merritt  
SmartGlove Psychogeographic Recording  
October 22, 2016

Vero and A.D. Elden  
**Sculpture Garden**

Session Summary:  
Dwell time: 1 hr, 13 min  
Overall sentiment: happy  
#tweets: 5  
#photos: 3



**Lorelie Coronet**  
American, born 1996

#### ***SmartGlove Prototype***

2016

Cotton, latex, copper wire, biometric sensors  
Gift of the inventor in celebration of her graduation from the University of Chicago in 2017

This biometric glove tracks the wearer's position within the Museum via indoor GPS, while measuring pulse and skin conductance. The SmartGlove app, synched to a SmartUser's social media accounts, also performs sentiment analysis of tweets and photos sent from the gallery. The combined data is used to create a psychogeographic map of each visit to the museum.

The SmartGlove app is designed to interface with the SmartArtMentor, introduced by the Smart Museum of Art in 2015. This artificial intelligence program compiles a personalized profile of each registered SmartUser. Drawing on data from past visits, the algorithm generates personalized suggestions for new art experiences at the Smart and elsewhere.

Traveling in Washington DC, for example, a SmartUser might receive a text: "Noticed you are feeling a little down today. You have an hour before your next appointment: why not visit the Rothko Room at the Phillips Collection? That might cheer you up. [Tap for directions and to pre-purchase tickets.]"

—Notes—



“I need you to survive and thrive.  
You need me to grow.”

Faheem Majeed

**Trust Through Access**

## Trust through Access

My proposition for what must sit at the heart of an engage museum is “Reciprocal Trust.”

Museums must give opportunities for their audience to have “Access.” A simple gesture of offering a set of keys can convert an audience member into a stakeholder. The sooner the audience becomes a stakeholder the sooner they are implicated in the success or failure of the institution. The museum must trust that their audience has the capacity to be trusted with the nurturing and care taking of it’s mission, history, and future.

As an example I offer a set of instructions and the coveted “Panda Keys.” These are one of several sets of keys that the historic Jane Addams Hull House loans to people to allow access to its facilities during non business hours.

### **Faheem Majeed**

Associate Director, School of Art and Art History,  
University of Illinois at Chicago



# Hull-House Museum

## Opening Procedure for the Residents' Dining Hall (RDH)

- 1) Call campus police (312-996-1212), give them your name and tell them you are OPENING Building 671: the Residents' Dining Hall.
- 2) Enter building through north entrance with the "exterior" key and lock the door handle behind you. You will need to open both top and bottom lock.
- 3) Turn alarm OFF with switch on the right side of the elevator on the 1st floor.
- 4) Open doors to dining room using the "interior" key and locate the metal light box. The lights turn on with the 1, 2 and 3 fuses and switches inside the dining hall will adjust them. You can either open the pantry door from within or using the "interior" key.
- 5) Go to 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and turn on lights in the hallway with switch by drinking fountain.

## Closing Procedure for the RDH

- 1) In dining room, make sure:
  - a. All trash has been taken out.
  - b. All chairs are in their proper location. All folding tables have been folded up and put away.
  - c. Tables have been wiped down with a damp rag.
  - d. Floors have been swept. Please check under chairs and tables for any stray food, silverware, etc.
  - e. If necessary, the floor should be mopped with cold water (mop and bucket can be found in the kitchen).
- 2) Close door behind you and make sure the dining room looks exactly as you found it.
- 3) Turn off the 1, 2, and 3 fuses to shut lights off.
- 4) Close and make sure all interior doors are locked: inner dining room door, both outer dining room doors, butler's pantry, kitchen and basement doors.
- 5) Switch off lobby lights.
- 6) Switch the alarm ON and exit building through north door, locking it behind you. If top lock is locked, the handle will not jiggle. Once top lock is locked, lock the bottom lock to bolt door.
- 7) Call campus police (312-996-1212), give them your name and tell them you are CLOSING Building 671: The Residents' Dining Hall.
- 8) PLACE BUILDING KEYS INTO THE MAIL SLOT OF THE MAIN MUSEUM BUILDING
- 9) Please discard this note in a safe manner.

## Contributors Biographies

**René de Guzman** is the senior curator of art at the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA). He joined OMCA in 2007 to complete the reinstallation of the Gallery of California Art. Previously, de Guzman was Director of Visual Arts at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) in San Francisco where he worked with emerging and mid-career local, national, and international artists for 15 years. De Guzman's ongoing interest both at OMCA and YBCA is how to build innovative institutions that create of community around cultural activity. De Guzman is an arts consultant, and art educator as Adjunct Professor in the Graduate Division of the Curatorial Studies Program at the California College of the Arts.

In addition to a range of exhibit projects—including an exhibition on the Black Panther Party's 50th anniversary—de Guzman is key developer for revising OMCA's collecting plan, a process that has inspired profound conversations about the value and meaning of museums in contemporary society.

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**Carroll Joynes** is the Senior Fellow at the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago, where he received his doctoral degree. Joynes has taught at the University of Chicago, as part of the graduate faculty of the New School University in the Lang College, and at New York University.

Joynes co-founded the Cultural Policy Center at the Harris School of Public Policy in 1999. He has served as a trustee of several cultural institutions in Chicago, including WTTW, The Newberry Library, Chicago Opera Theater, the Alliance Francaise. He is Currently on the board of the Better Government Association. Joynes is co-author with Joanna

Woronkowicz and Norman Bradburn, of *Set in Stone*, a large-scale empirical study that appeared in 2012 that examines in detail the cultural building boom that unfolded in the past two decades in the U.S. His latest book—*Building Better Arts Facilities: Lessons from a U.S. National Study*—is coming out in December 2014 at Routledge. This book looks at more than 800 building projects for museums, performing arts centers and theaters.

It focuses on, among other things, the complex decision-making process that very often led to cost overruns and in some cases, significantly weakened organizations because of financial stresses that were imposed by ambitious building programs. These projects, however, also helped create some very successful new venues for a growing national population.

Joynes is currently at work on a project about cultural districts being constructed around the globe (about 75 are currently underway, at a combined cost of over \$200 billion.) He is also in the early stages of a study examining board leadership and organizational dynamics in non-profit arts institutions.

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**Lisa Junkin Lopez** is an emerging leader in the museum field with ten years of experience in arts administration, public history, exhibitions and cultural programming. Lisa has worked at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum for six years and currently serves as Interim Director. She is a core faculty member of the Museum and Exhibition Studies program at UIC.

Lisa serves on the National Board of Editors for *The Public Historian*, a journal of the National Council on Public History. In 2014 she was awarded Outstanding Public

History Project by the National Council on Public History. In 2011-12, Lisa was a Policy and Social Engagement fellow at UIC's Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy and in 2011 won the Association of Midwest Museums' "Promising Leadership" award. Lisa earned a master's degree in art education at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a bachelor's degree in Art History at the College of William & Mary.

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**Faheem Majeed** is an artist, educator, curator, and community facilitator. He blends his unique experience as a non-profit administrator, curator, and artist to create works that focus on institutional critique and exhibitions that leverage collaboration to engage his immediate, and the broader community, in meaningful dialogue.

Majeed received his BFA from Howard University and his MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC).

From 2005-2011, Majeed served as Executive Director and Curator for the South Side Community Art Center (SSCAC). In this role he was responsible for managing operations, staff, programs, fundraising and curation for the SSCAC. During his time with the SSCAC, Majeed curated exhibitions of numerous artists including Elizabeth Catlett, Dr. David Driskell, Charles White, Jonathan Green, and Theaster Gates.

In 2012 Majeed served as artist in residence for the University of Chicago's Arts in Public Life Initiative. Currently, Majeed is associate director and faculty of UIC's School Art & Art History.

**Elizabeth Merritt** is the Founding Director, Center for the Future of Museums (CFM). In 2008, Merritt was charged by the Alliance board with creating the CFM to help museums understand the cultural, political, economic, environmental, and technological trends shaping the world, and explore innovative ways to help their communities thrive in coming decades. Examples of CFM's work include working with key partners to found the Let's Move Museums & Gardens initiative to support national anti-obesity efforts; and deploying the Met Life funded Innovation Lab for Museums. Prior to CFM, Merritt led the Alliance's standards & research programs. (M.A. Duke, B.S. Yale, University of Houston Futures Studies Certificate Course).

Before being appointed CFM's first director, Elizabeth led the Excellence Programs at AAM—Accreditation, Museum Assessment and Peer Review—as well as the association's research activities. Before that, she spent 15 years working in museums in administration, curation and collections management. Her areas of expertise include futures studies, museum standards and best practices, ethics, collections management and planning, and assessment of nonprofit performance. Her books include “National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums” and the “AAM Guide to Collections Planning.” She blogs for CFM at [futureofmuseums.blogspot.com](http://futureofmuseums.blogspot.com) and tweets as @futureofmuseums.



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