Greetings from your Chairperson!

What do you think are the important trends for curators right now?

We are excited about new projects underway that will help to answer that question. Preliminary planning is underway to develop CurCom webinars through AAM. We are also looking forward to celebrating CurCom’s 40th anniversary in 2015.

How can you participate?

- Share your ideas for webinar topics by completing the forthcoming survey or sharing suggestions with anyone on the CurCom Board.

- Share your favorite curatorial research project in a 3-minute video this fall via AAM’s YouTube channel (stay tuned for more information). Your 3 minutes of fame could turn into a 10-minute spotlight!

Baltimore 2013 – Overview
CurCom continued to have an important impact on the museum community at the Annual Meeting in Baltimore in May. If you attended, you were able to see excellent exhibition labels in the Marketplace of Ideas. They will be posted on the CurCom website. Thanks to John Russick (Chicago History Museum) who coordinated the Excellence in Label Writing Competition with the aid of Andrea Michelbach, a graduate student at the University of Washington.

Stacey Swigart (Please Touch Museum) served as the CurCom representative for the Excellence in Exhibitions Competition. Winners shared their work in a very interesting session. This year Stacey will assume the role of competition coordinator as CurCom takes its 2-year turn. We rotate this responsibility with EdCom, NAME, and CARE. David Kennedy (Cherokee Strip Regional Center) will be the incoming CurCom judge.

Participate in Seattle! Please consider submitting your own labels and exhibitions to both competitions for Seattle 2014. Deadlines will be this fall.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks to all our contributors and writers for this issue of Update:

Ivan D. Henderson, University of Delaware
Amy Griffin, Virginia Commonwealth University
Jim Hoobler, Tennessee State Museum
Nathan Jones, General George Patton Museum of Leadership
Alison Heney, Xipe Projects
Ann Lane Hedland, Arizona State Museum
Darlene F. Lizarraga, Arizona State Museum
We thank Delta Designs, Ltd. http://www.deltadesignsltd.com/ once again for their generous sponsorship of the CurCom/SMAC/COMPT/L&M reception. We also thank the Sports Legends Museum at Camden Yards for allowing us to hold it at their facility. http://baberuthmuseum.org/

Always feel free to reach out to CurCom Board members with ideas and questions.

Many thanks go to the Board members who produce this newsletter, manage the webpage, serve on the Ethics Committee, manage CurCom’s Facebook and LinkedIn pages, and serve on the Program Committee in preparation for Seattle, among other task forces and committees.

There is much going on with CurCom!

Ellen Endslow (Chester County Historical Society)
CurCom Chairperson

SUBSCRIPTION AND MEMBERSHIP

Update is the periodic newsletter distributed to members of CurCom. It is also available on-line at http://www.curcom.org

CurCom (Curators’ Committee) is a Professional Network (PN) committee of the American Alliance of Museums. All SPC members must join the AAM. Dues for CurCom ($20.00 / $10.00 for students) are payable in addition to AAM dues.

Membership is obtained through:

Membership Department
American Alliance of Museums
1575 Eye St. N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005

Phone (202) 289 9132; fax (202) 289 6578; email membership@aam-us.org

Future AAM Annual Meetings

Seattle, WA
May 18-21, 2014

Atlanta, GA
April 26-29, 2015
One hundred fifty years have passed since the 1863 publication of Los Desastres de la Guerra (The Disasters of War) by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid. Its eighty etchings depicting scenes of war, famine, and political commentary had been created half a century earlier by Francisco Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828).

Living in Madrid throughout the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, Goya undoubtedly heard accounts of the war and atrocities suffered throughout the Iberian Peninsula; he may even have been an eyewitness to the fleeing refugees and the aftermath of battle during a brief trip to Zaragoza in the fall of 1808. Rather than firsthand accounts, Los Desastres de la Guerra present an extended meditation on the tragedy of war in its many aspects, from corpses strewn on the field of battle and scenes of combat and torture to the impact of armed conflict on civilians of all ages. Going beyond the plausible, Goya also created allegorical images referring to the political instability that followed the expulsion of the rey intruso, or intruder king, Joseph Bonaparte. As the series took form, he probably realized that these subjects would appeal to few in a capital decimated by war and enemy occupation; published half a century after its creation, the series was interpreted within a context that Goya could never have imagined, informed by photography of the Crimean War and the Civil War in the United States.

The sequence of the etchings in the published edition follows that of a complete set of pre-publication proofs that Goya gave to the art historian and collector Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez by 1819. Goya put the etchings in sequence months—and probably years—after making them. In this exhibition, Curator Janis Tomlinson has ordered prints from the first edition to re-construct the internal chronology of the series, or the order in which the images were created, to illustrate the stylistic and thematic evolution of these prints within their broader historical context.

The exhibition is a collaboration of the University Museums, University of Delaware and the Pomona College Museum of Art. It is curated by Janis Tomlinson, Director, University Museums, and circulated by Pomona College Museum of Art.

For more information please call 302-831-8037, email university-museums@udel.edu, or visit www.udel.edu/museums
During the Annual Meeting, I learned that I achieved candidate status in my Museum Studies Master’s program. The timing was perfect. I had defended my thesis proposal for a self-guided tour of the built environment surrounding the National Building Museum in Washington, DC. But I still lacked fresh ideas for the tour’s design and a guiding principle for selecting its content. The AAM conference, which I could not have attended without the support of the CurCom fellowship, introduced new energy and a clear direction to my one remaining graduate project. Its narrative framework will owe itself to the conference theme, “The Power of Story.” The information it contains will have been inspired by sessions about the audiences museum collections serve. Presentations on narrative interpretation resonated with the goal of my thesis: to communicate how architecture and urban design changes over time. Dan Spock of the Minnesota Historical Society described how he identifies narrative in the design process itself. As people plan, build, and revise designs, Spock argued, the work expresses particular ideologies, aspirations, successes, and failures. The design process is dramatic! With a whole neighborhood in Washington to work with, surely there is latent intrigue in the careers of its architects. This approach infuses technical information with personality and uncovers the motivations that gave rise to the contemporary landscape.

Keynote speaker Freeman A. Hrabowski remarked that stories are rarely static, that they change over time and with the teller. As Karleen Gardner of the Minneapolis Institute of Art demonstrated in her presentation on the resident-artist Kianga Ford, the city, and our experience of it, is similarly inconstant. Using highly choreographed audio recordings, Ford invites us to explore how one place takes on new meaning as we receive different signals, as our mood shifts. While illuminating contrasts between the past and present is the goal of my thesis, Ford’s work suggests the possibility of examining changes that the urban environment effects in ourselves by appealing to all the senses.

In “Talking About Race: ‘Mining the Museum’ After 20 Years,” presenters articulated how curatorial choices can deny people their stories. Fred Wilson, author of “Mining the Museum” at the Maryland Historical Society, stated that the 1993 exhibition responded to a conviction that his history was not represented, was even flagrantly omitted by that museum and the stories told through its collection. After this session, I reconsidered what buildings I would include in my project, especially those I had judged essential for their traditional artistic or historical associations.

Reflecting on the Annual Meeting, I am struck by the tremendous variety of people, places, and ideas I was exposed to through a single event. My work going forward will be impacted by the experiences of museum professionals from coast to coast, and this gives me confidence that it will enact the most current and comprehensive methodology. I already understood that presentation matters as much as content, but the conference showed me the particular value of entertaining, responsive, and purposeful storytelling.
 Internationally known ceramic artist Sylvia Hyman, who passed away earlier this year, allowed the Tennessee State Museum’s Curator of Art & Architecture to dispose of her studio contents through a bequest. From her studio, 414 pieces were selected, with the help of her studio assistant Cathy Moberg. These range from the silk screens used to produce some of her printed trompe l’oeil works, to partially completed works, tools, drawings, molds, and color test discs.

Sylvia Hyman was an artist who constantly grew and experimented with her medium over the course of several decades. Forty-one examples of her work are in the museum collection. This gift will enable the museum to exhibit the tools she used in the process of making her incredible art.

In addition, the museum purchased a remarkable photographic collection assembled by Nashville resident Bruce Jackson. It consists of 180 images, primarily photographic, and of Nashville. They begin with the Civil War, and go in time up to the 1920’s. Nearly all are nineteenth century. They focus on Nashville during the Civil War, Otto Giers stereograph slides from the 1880’s of Nashville, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, and a few images of Union Occupied Murfreesboro. Also in the collection are Civil War watercolor s of Union camp life.

*Right*- This photograph of Belmont Mansion, taken about 1863 from the water tower on the grounds, is a rare image of Tennessee’s finest estate of the time period.
Museums – the homes of the muses… a place where ideas inspire those who enter its transformative space. Since 2010, the General George Patton Museum has been getting back to the foundations of what makes a museum a museum. In an era of extreme mission creep, when museums are trying to be everything for everyone, the Patton museum refocused its mission on an idea: leadership.

The 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRACC) moved the US Army’s armor and cavalry school to Fort Benning, Georgia. However, an outcry from the local community at Fort Knox kept the General Patton collection in place. The portion of the collection depicting the history of cavalry and armor moved south with the schoolhouse, effectively dividing a collection and creating two separate museums.

Since 2010, the Patton Museum moved under the operational control of the Army’s Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Cadet Command, which trains upward are 75% of the Army’s newly commissioned officers every year. A new focus for the museum was necessary.

Leadership is timeless. Every organization needs it. Those who don’t have it crave it. Those who have leadership often cannot define it. Defining an intangible trait is difficult, but illustrating an intangible trait with objects is even more challenging. The concept of leadership is the new focus of the Patton Museum. No longer a museum about history for history’s sake, the institution now uses history, particularly that of the life and career of its namesake, to illustrate the leadership model defined in the Army Regulation 6-22. Most importantly, the museum seeks to allow visitors to forge an identity.

To create a museum from scratch centered on an idea was challenging. However, so far it has been well received by the community. By doing so, we have been able to meet several needs and requirements – from the curriculum of cadets enrolled in ROTC courses, to the leadership development courses for the Army, and even the character development curriculum requirements for grade school children.

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Rather than dumping money into a Universal Studio style immersive exhibit design that does not allow for flexibility, we invested in the rudiments of an exhibit: cases, mounts, graphics, and labels. Then, we infused augmented reality technology (AR) to enhance the visitor experience. Static immersive scenes are inflexible while AR allows us to go far beyond the three-dimensional realm of the gallery. Now, instead of a diorama scene, we can place large artifacts in context digitally by overlaying semitransparent historic footage or images. Visitors can even video or take pictures of themselves in the scene, share it on the museum Facebook page or with their friends, and tweet the curator. Our future plans include the ability to scan objects on exhibit and order a 3D model print that you can purchase on the way out.

The opportunities this design provides are only limited by our imagination (and money, of course). With the ability to layer information, the curator is able to write label copy for visitors with varying levels of interest and knowledge. We can be as general or specific as we want and visitors can decide to what level they wish to participate. A feedback function allows the visitor to send email messages directly to the curator, effectively eliminating paper comment cards.

For educators, museum experiences can be tailored to meet specific curriculum requirements. Quizzes, decision theory games, Kinect technology, and digital take-home information augment learning. Gamification reinforces learning and makes it enjoyable for students. The platform might even make it possible to participate in badging and perhaps issuing micro credentials.

The important thing to remember when thinking about augmented reality platforms is that they only work in galleries around authentic artifacts. As they name indicates, this technology merely augments the real. The objects give the experience its power to change and inspire, otherwise augmented reality is just another video game. A well informed, sophisticated, challenging, and captivating narrative gives the experience a coherent framework. The traditional role of the curator was very much in play during the entire project…but just a little different and just as exciting.

By coupling the old with the new, the General George Patton Museum not only has an increased relevancy, it is reinventing the way exhibits are designed. Using technology to make the collection accessible in new ways, enhance the visitor experience, and place artifacts in context, while writing an exhibit narrative centered around a universal idea that allows visitors to forge their own identity, has been an exciting and rewarding (and exhausting) curatorial endeavor.
Arizona State Museum Launches Databases to Share Southwest Textiles with the World

Like never before, two brand new, searchable, and illustrated databases aim to share the artistry and study of southwestern textiles with the world. The databases, plus extensive background information and helpful guides, are available on the Arizona State Museum website at:

http://www.statemuseum.arizona.edu/coll/textile/asm_southwest_textile_database/

Available at the click of a mouse are baseline data and images essential for understanding the evolution of three cultural textile traditions in the American Southwest—Navajo, Pueblo, and Spanish-American. Focusing on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the information spans three major periods from the time of Spanish governance to 1821, the Mexican era until 1846, and the American and early reservation period since then.

These groundbreaking resources represent the culmination of decades of research by two worldrenowned textile authorities: the late Dr. Joe Ben Wheat of the University of Colorado at Boulder and Dr. Ann Lane Hedlund, who recently retired as curator at Arizona State Museum and professor of anthropology at the University of Arizona.

Of this capstone project, Hedlund said, “These tools can be used by anyone to create absolutely new knowledge about the Southwest’s Native American and European-influenced textile traditions. Most importantly, as an anthropologist who studies both living and long past artists, I want artists of all stripes to have access to this wondrous visual and technical compilation.”

Though other online databases of museum collections exist, and there are certainly in-depth databases of ceramics and other media, there is nothing quite like these two new textile resources in terms of their detail and query-based interactivity.

“It’s also a first to have such stellar visual, technical, and historical selections from so many museum collections gathered in one place for comparisons,” said Hedlund. “I know of nothing that allows visitors as much access and ability to query the data as this incredible store of information does. We included nearly every SW textile in our collection, some 600 examples, and just over 1300 specimens studied by Wheat in 50 other public collections.”

One of the first two recipients of a PhD in anthropology at the University of Arizona, Wheat is the author of Blanket Weaving in the Southwest, which Hedlund edited and posthumously published in 2003. Hedlund’s books include Reflections of the Weaver’s World, Navajo Weaving in the Late 20th Century, Navajo Weavings from the Andy Williams Collection, and Gloria F. Ross & Modern Tapestry. Hedlund also is curator of many textile exhibits and has presented countless public lectures around the world.

The online databases were engineered by ASM Webmaster Laura LePere and Applications Programmer Michael Ornelas, with contributions by David Hayden of Museum Data Solutions and many other valuable participants who are acknowledged on each website.

Classic Period Sarape
Navajo (Diné)
Circa 1840-1860
Wool, Cochineal and Indigo dye
Collected by Lieutenant John Sanford Mason around 1880
Museum purchase from Major Ennalls Waggaman, 1954
Courtesy of Arizona State Museum Catalog No. E-2724
Xipe Projects Acquires the Pieper Collection of Mexican Masks
Alison Heney, Chief Curator

The staff at Xipe Projects is very pleased to announce the recent acquisition of the Jim and Jeanne Pieper collection of Mexican masks. Partly through purchase and partly through the generosity of Jim and Jeanne, Xipe Projects was able to acquire their entire Mexican mask collection, comprising eighty-two extraordinary examples collected between 1960 and 1990 from various regions of Mexico. The Pieper masks will greatly enhance Xipe’s present collection of approximately three hundred dance masks from Mexico and Guatemala, many of which are now on display at our Huntington Beach, CA location.

The Pieper collection is noteworthy for its masks from Northern Mexico, an area of particular interest to us and the subject of our recent exhibition, “The Persistence of the Flower World,” featuring the dance traditions of the Yaqui, Mayo, Tarahumara, and Cora peoples, and for its range of devil masks from such diverse areas as the states of San Luis Potosí, Michoacán, Mexico, and Guerrero.

Jim and Jeanne are long-time collectors and have always been a remarkable presence in the world of collectors of ethnographic art, especially the masks of Mexico and Guatemala. Jim has curated several exhibits, served on the boards of a number of museums including the Fowler Museum of Cultural History at UCLA, and is a member of the Ethnic Arts Council of Los Angeles. He has written extensively on the masks and folk saints of Guatemala.

Xipe Projects is a non-profit educational foundation established in 2011 under the direction of Peter T. Markman and is located in Huntington Beach California. A large part of its mission is to collect and exhibit the masks and popular art of Latin America and to conduct and underwrite research that explores the symbolic language and aesthetic forms of collective ritual and cultural performance throughout Mexico and Guatemala.

We are always interested in acquiring significant individual pieces or collections to enhance our ability to exhibit the best and most exciting art exemplifying the creative spirit of the popular artists of Latin America.

For more information, please visit our website at www.xipeprojects.com or contact our chief curator, Dr. Alison Heney, at staff@xipeprojects.com

Vieja mask from Baila Viejo, Guaytalpa, Nacajuca, Tabasco, used and sold by Graciano Lazaro Cordoba, mid 20th century.

Pascola mask, Mayo, mid 20th century.
In Memorial
Jill Suzanne Beute Koverman

Jill Suzanne Beute Koverman COLUMBIA, SC - Jill Suzanne Beute Koverman passed away Monday, July 29, 2013, surrounded by her loving family.

Jill was a graduate of Emory University and received her Master of Arts degree in Art History at the University of South Carolina. Jill was an accomplished scholar who specialized in Edgefield pottery and potters. She researched and curated a major exhibition at McKissick Museum, "I made this jar..." The Life and Works of the Enslaved African-American Potter, Dave. The catalog from the exhibit, which Jill edited, won the American Decorative Arts Society's Charles F. Montgomery Award which is presented annually to the author of the most outstanding first major publication in the field of American decorative arts.

Her work experience included the Atlanta History Center, McKissick Museum and Historic Charleston Foundation, as well as serving as a private curator. At each institution she made lasting contributions and held herself and others to the highest professional standards. She was admired by colleagues around the state and U.S. Jill received numerous accolades for her scholarly work and publications and served as President of the South Carolina Museums Conference and as a board member of the Edisto Island Historic Preservation Society, to name only two of her affiliations.

Jill was first and foremost an amazingly kind and humble person, a wonderful wife, a stellar mother, a mentor and a loyal friend. She warmed the world with her smile. Jill was a sailor who met her husband, Scott, at a regatta and was happiest on or near the water. One of her last wishes was to take one more trip to Edisto Island. A memorial service was held Thursday, August 1 2013, at Caughman-Harman Funeral Home, Irmo/St. Andrews Chapel, 5400 Bush River Road, Columbia, SC 29212. For the service, it was requested to please bring your happy memories and leave the Kleenex at home. In lieu of flowers, buy yourself a cool plant and plant it in your yard. When it blooms think about the beauty of love and the fragility of life.