

Greetings from your Chair

With the recent Board elections, we are in transition. Two of our long-time stalwarts have rotated off of the Board. Beth Davis and Rebecca Carruthers have given years of service, and will be missed. Beth Davis has served on the board since 1998. She was the newsletter editor from 1998 to 2001, and served as a Board Member-at-large from 1998 to 2004. Rebecca Carruthers served as the Western Regional Representative from 2001 to 2004, and chaired the Fellowship Award Committee in 2001 and 2002, and the Board Nominating Committee in 2004. Diana Blanchard-Gross is also rotating off of the Board, having served as a Board Member-at-large from 2002 through 2004. Lin Nelson-Mayson is rotating off of the Exhibition Competition Committee as the CurCom judge. She served in that capacity from 2002 through 2004. We all owe them our deep thanks and appreciation for their work on our behalf. But they have pledged to stay active, and work for the committee by bringing in material for the newsletter, and by recruiting new members and new program sessions for the annual meeting.

We also have six new people serving on the board. Brian Peterson is a name that is familiar to our members. He has chaired the Marketplace of Ideas for several years, and put together an exhibition label writing program for that now since 1999. Brian has just written a book on Robert Spencer, a New York and Bucks County artist of note, entitled *The Cities, the Towns, the Crowds: the Paintings of Robert Spencer*. Brian is our Regional Representative for the Mid-Atlantic. Also newly serving as Regional Representatives are Kelly Cobble and Ron M. Potvin for New England, and Rebecca Moore for the South-east. Joyce Henri Robinson and Jeannine Pederson have come on as Board Members-at-large. You might recall that Jeannine won a Fellowship in 2002. Elisa Phelps is continuing as Immediate Past Chair. She is now the Director of Collections & Library at the Colorado Historical Society.

Membership continues to grow. We are now at around 700. This makes us one of the largest Standing Professional Committees. You are of course the reason for that. You help spread the word, and our numbers increase. Also Deborah Tout-Smith is doing a great job as the newsletter editor, and Valarie Kinkade is overseeing the build-out of our web site. The new members-only access to the list of curators who are CurCom members will be available soon. We have an active, committed board. We also want all of the membership to be active and involved in the work of the committee, and you can do so by volunteering to help out with the Program Committee, the web-site, and the newsletter. So, let us hear from you. We will put you to work.

Jim Hoobler
Senior Curator for Art & Architecture
Tennessee State Museum

Inside

Ask a Curator

4

CurCom Business
Luncheon Minutes

5

Marketplace of Ideas
Report

9

Taskforce on Museums
and Diversity

17

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SUBSCRIPTION AND MEMBERSHIP

Update is the periodic newsletter distributed to members of CurCom.

CurCom (Curators' Committee) is a Standing Professional Committee (SPC) of the American Association of Museums. All SPC members must join the AAM. Dues for the Committee (\$10.00) are payable in addition to AAM dues.

Membership is obtained through:

Membership Department
American Association 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.

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CURATORS' STANDING PROFESSIONAL COMMITTEE OF AAM

Chair	James A. Hoobler (2005) Tennessee State Museum jim.hoobler@state.tn.us
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As always, I'm able to open with warm thanks for the many contributions for publication in *Update*.

This issue features several reports from the successful Annual Meeting in New Orleans, as well as information on current events and issues including the Taskforces on SPCs and Museums and Diversity, changes to Federal funding, and peer reviewing. Regular columns include the ever-popular Ask a Curator and information on forthcoming conferences.

For our next issue, I invite members to consider submitting articles or comments on recent events in the museum sector. *Update* provides an ideal opportunity to share experiences and opinions, as well as news and opportunities for members.

I have news of my own to share: I've been appointed National Convener for the Museum Historians' Special Interest Group of Museums Australia. This association is the closest equivalent to CurCom that we have in Australia. This will not effect my role as Editor of *Update* — in fact I see this as an opportunities to strengthen our ties.

Deborah Tout-Smith

Future AAM Annual Meetings

Indianapolis, IN
May 1-5 2005

Boston, MA
April 27-May 1 2006

The site for the CurCom receptions in Indianapolis and Boston have been selected.

I chose the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame and Museum as our site for 2005, as the Indy 500 is probably the best known thing about that city.

For Boston in 2006, I chose the Boston Public Library main building. It is a turn of the century, circa 1900 grand structure with art frescoes by John Singer Sargent, Puvis de Chavannes, and Edwin Austin Abbey. The building was designed by McKim Mead and White. There is also sculpture by Augustus St. Gaudens. So, it is a spectacular place.

Jim Hoobler

ASK A CURATOR

Dear Fellow Curator,

I was recently hired as Head Curator for a natural history museum, replacing my predecessor who, ahem, 'retired' after 30-years of service. The director has asked me to introduce myself to the former curator and request a visit to her home with the ulterior motive of looking at her personal collection for any items that she might have taken from the museum.

While I told the director that any suspicions should be reported to the police, he responded that a casual look around would put his mind at rest. Any chance I can get out of this lose/lose situation?

Signed,

Messy in Missouri

Dear Messy,

Burgled beetles? Purloined pachyderms? Stolen stalagmites? Perhaps Martha Stewart was the curator's decorator?

Ideally, curators who follow the profession's code of ethics do not collect in the same field as their specialty at their institution. (Failure to abide this law results in six weeks of wet-noodle lashing by a museum educator who simultaneously re-writes the curator's label copy over and over and over...)

But when passions extend from the office to the bedroom (racy, eh??) care must be given to ensure that personal collections do not present a conflict of interest. When said collections overlap, proving ownership, particularly in a field where specimens are collected by a scientist, can be tricky at best. And yet the FBI reports that most museum thefts are inside jobs.

If attempts to get out of this request from your director are continuously rebuffed, let's turn this situation to your advantage – after all, this meeting with the former curator could offer insight into your new institution's politics as well as what sounds like a wishy-washy management style. First, figure out another excuse for the visitation, such as asking her to clarify specimen identification or to discuss a long-time donor's relationship to the museum.

Second, briefly ask the director if you should be on the lookout for something in particular during your visit, such as a giant amethyst geode or an oversized clam shell. Prior to visiting, look at your museum's collection to see how/if objects are marked with accession numbers.

Third, if the curator actually does invite you into her home (dumb on her part, but you never know), ask to see her collection and unobtrusively take a look for anything that might suggest foul play.

Fourth, truthfully report back to your director. Did you see anything with an accession number on it? Was there one item that is obviously part of a set of things in the museum? If not, you should be in the clear and can resume your study of that adorable spider species that freaks out your little niece when she visits your lab.

However if you smelled something fishy you need to deftly convey that to the director while recommending appropriate protocol for a formal investigation. This process would include the museum's registrar and/or collections manager and the involvement of the board or certain representatives (and your museum's attorney of course, if you have one).

Hope this helps. I'm off to go dust my Faberge egg collection.

Please send in your questions for the Curator to Deborah Tout-Smith....

Minutes of the CurCom Business Luncheon

May 9, 2004

New Orleans Convention Center, New Orleans, Louisiana

1. Chair Jim Hoobler called the meeting to order and welcomed the group to the Curators' Committee luncheon and business meeting. Jim announced the unfortunate cancellation of the luncheon program.
2. **AAM, SPC and General News.** Jim Hoobler mentioned the creation of the AAM Diversity Committee as an SPC and the opportunity for a curator to serve as a liaison between DIVCO and CurCom. There had been some frustrating discussions regarding the most effective way to strengthen participation and deepen awareness of diversity issues. Jim encouraged all to work to make this initiative a success. Next year the Annual Meeting will be in Indianapolis, and the curators' reception will be at the Speedway Museum. It should be a good time for all.
3. **Annual Meeting Sessions.** Linda Eppich, Vice President, reported that all seven sessions and the marketplace program recommended by CurCom were approved. The organization of sessions is one of the most important parts of the Committee. Linda encouraged anybody with ideas and an interest to work to prepare a proposal for next year's meeting. The theme of the conference is 'A Defining Moment – Museums at the Crossroads'. Proposals are due July 9, and she would be glad to answer questions regarding the process via e-mail at laeppich@cox.net.
4. **Secretary's Report.** John Mayer, Treasurer and Secretary, reported that the health of CurCom is strong. The Committee has 697 members, the most ever, and our financial position is good with a positive balance of \$24,000.
5. **Website.** Valerie Kinkade reported that the CurCom web site is up and running and continues to develop as an informative and useful resource. The current segment of the site is a 'members only' feature that will include a database of members as a means of promoting networking between curators. She reminded the audience to complete the membership form. Jim Hoobler also reminded the audience that images of exhibits, collection items, and other visual items can be sent to Valerie for use on the web site.
6. **Curators' Marketplace.** Brian Peterson shared some background on the organization of the exhibit label-writing marketplace. This was the third time he has organized this, and it continues to be an interesting and useful program. Jurors from NAME, EDCOM, CARE and CurCom worked together and reviewed 114 submissions from 42 institutions. They ultimately chose 10 examples. Handouts included examples of label text, comments from the jurors, and a bibliography. It's a very good program, funded by CurCom.

(Continued on page 6)



(Continued from page 5)

7. **Election.** Rebecca Caruthers reported that four officers were elected to At-large positions on the CurCom Board: Ellen Enslow, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA; Joyce Henry Robinson, Palmer Museum at Penn State University, College Park, PA; Jeannine Pederson, Catalina Island Museum, Avalon, CA; and Elizabeth Schlatter, University of Richmond Museums, Richmond, VA.
8. **Fellowship.** Ellen Endslow introduced the two recipients of the CurCom fellowship this year: Cindy Olsen, Curator of Collections at the Studebakker Museum in South Bend, Indiana; and Ron Potvin, Historic Site Administrator at the John Nicholas Brown Center in Providence, Rhode Island. Ellen reported that there was a very strong pool of candidates to draw from. The award is \$1,000 to help with travel to the Annual Meeting and is awarded to those who have not ever attended the AAM Annual Meeting.
9. **Exhibit Competition.** Lin Nelson-Mayson reported on this successful program, started by CurCom, and now in its 16th year. This year there were 23 submissions from both large and small institutions. The winning exhibits will be presented at a session during the conference. Next year Kevin Tucker of CurCom will serve as judge and coordinator for the competition.
10. **Thank you.** Jim Hoobler thanked the all for coming and for their support.

Minutes respectfully presented by
John Mayer, Secretary



CurCom Chairs

Left to right: Jim Hoobler (current, Tennessee State Museum), Elisa Phelps (1997-2001, Colorado Historical Society), Lyn Nelson-Mayson (mid 1990s, Exhibits USA), Jane Shadel Spillman (early 1990s, Corning Museum of Glass).

Photo courtesy Linda Eppich

2004 CurCom Fellowship Winners

The winners of the 2004 CurCom Fellowships to attend the AAM meeting in New Orleans were Ron Potvin, Historic Site Administrator at The John Nicholas Brown Center in Providence, Rhode Island, and Cindy Olson, Curator of Collections and Exhibits at the Studebaker National Museum in South Bend, Indiana.

Cindy earned an MA in Public History from Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan. Prior to her current position, Cindy worked at the Star-Spangled Banner Flag House and 1812 Museum in Baltimore, Heritage Preservation in Washington, DC, the Northern Indiana Center for History in South Bend, and numerous collections internships and contract projects in Michigan and Wisconsin.

Ron earned an MA in American History from the University of Connecticut in Storrs. He then worked at The Newport Historical Society in Rhode Island in various capacities including Assistant Curator, Curator of Special Collections and Director of Historic Sites before obtaining his current position. He is the Co-Chair of the New England Association of Curators' Professional Affinity Group and has been a consultant on various history projects and a presenter at professional



Left to right: Cindy Olson, Ron Potvin, and Ellen Endslow

Photo courtesy Linda Eppich

AAM Writing Competition

AAM is pleased to announce the creation of an annual writing competition, the Brooking Paper on Creativity in Museums. Funding for the competition comes from Dolores Brooking, professor of arts administration at California State University, Dominguez Hills. The winning paper will focus on notable examples of creativity, innovation, and imagination in museum operations. The first paper will be published in *Museum News*. Winning articles also will be available online. A prize of \$1,000 will be awarded to the author.

Papers should be approximately 2,500 words and describe any aspect of museum operations: education, collections, finance, exhibitions, community relations, staff structure, leadership, and everything in between. Previously published pieces will not be accepted.

Submissions will be accepted through November 30.

Email papers to jilusaka@aam-us.org with 'Brooking Paper' in the subject line or send a double-spaced hard copy to:

Brooking Paper
AAM Publications Department
1575 Eye St. N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005

AAM staff will screen papers, and judges will receive copies of the most promising papers for review in December and January. A final decision on the winner will be made by the three judges no later than March 31 2005.

AAM Curators' Committee Nominating Committee Report

Traveling Exhibits Available

Three traveling exhibits designed especially for small to mid-sized museums are now available for booking in 2005 and 2006.

'Here Comes the Bride: Weddings in America' explores the changes in courtships, engagements, weddings, and honeymoons over the last two centuries. 'Let's Play: Pastimes from the Past' looks at the ways Americans enjoyed their leisure time at the turn of the twentieth century. "What's Cookin'?: Two Centuries of American Foodways" examines food processing and marketing and the cooking and serving of food over the past century and a half.

Each exhibit covers 60 running feet of space, requires moderate security, and is available for six-week booking periods. The participation fee is \$500 plus common-carrier shipping to the next venue.

For further information, or to arrange a booking, contact Allyn Lord, Rogers Historical Museum, 322 S. Second St., Rogers, AR 72756; (479) 621-1154; museum@rogersarkansas.com.

The AAM CurCom Nominating Committee for 2003/2004 was:

Chairperson
Rebecca Carruthers
California State Railroad Museum
Sacramento, CA

James A. Hoobler
Tennessee State Museum
Nashville, TN

Linda Eppich
Preservation Society of Newport County
Newport, RI

The four Board Members-at-large were open for election in 2004. The following Board Members-at-large were elected and will serve two years. The term for these individuals will expire in 2006.

Ellen Endslo
Chester County Historical Society
West Chester, PA

Joyce Henri Robinson
Palmer Museum of Art
Pennsylvania State University, PA

Jeannine Pedersen
Catalina Island Museum
Santa Catalina Island, CA

N. Elizabeth Schlatter
University of Richmond Museums
Richmond, VA



A panel from "What's Cookin'?: Two Centuries of American Foodways"

Courtesy Rogers Historical Museum

In the Beginning (and the End) Is the Word: Best Practices in Museum Exhibition Writing

Marketplace of Ideas, AAM Annual Meeting, 2004
Sponsored by the AAM Curators' Committee

Chair: Brian H. Peterson, Senior Curator, James A. Michener Art Museum

Museums use audio tours, docents, and interactive educational programs to enhance the learning experiences of visitors, but most often exhibit professionals rely on the tried and true method: the written word. While there are many theories and recipes for label and text panel writing, people who are 'in the trenches' of exhibit creation often have to work out their own solutions. These solutions ideally are informed by thought, research and evaluation, but also are customized to fit the writers' own temperaments, their audience, and the particular nature of the exhibit concept. To help promote excellence in museum exhibition writing, museum professionals from around the country were invited to submit examples of their exhibit-related writing that were juried by a panel representing four AAM standing professional committees: CARE, EdCom, NAME, and CurCom. Winning entries were displayed at the Marketplace, along with books and articles on exhibit writing and related presentations by distinguished professionals.

In addition to the chair representing CurCom, the jurors for this year's competition were:

- (CARE) **Beverly Serrell**, Director of Serrell & Associates, distinguished writer and exhibit specialist, and author of the widely used book *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (AltaMira Press, 1996)
- (EdCom) **Vas Prabhu**, Deputy Director for Interpretation and Education at the Peabody Essex Museum and the 2002 recipient of the EdCom Award for Excellence in Practice
- (NAME) **Lynne Friman**, President of Envisions Design, past president of NAME, and former head of exhibition design and facility development at the Henry Ford Museum and the Detroit Historical Museum.

JURORS' STATEMENTS

Lynne Friman:

I had the following questions in mind as I read the submissions: Does the headline grab your attention, and set you up for the rest of the content? Do you want to keep reading? Is the body copy clear, to the point, descriptive, engaging, compelling, moving — using active words — perhaps even witty? Does the copy set an appropriate tone for the content? Does it offer clear instructions — what to do and look for? Is the language matched with the intended audience? Did it use 'big scholarly museum' words? Was it repetitive, or did it go on too long? If a design or format is included — did it add to the interpretive intent and ability? Do I want to continue looking at this exhibit?

(Continued on page 10)

AAM Accreditation Success

The Preservation Society of Newport County was accredited by AAM in April — including all ten historic houses and its exhibition program.

We congratulate the Society on its success.

The Preservation Society of Newport County is a private non-profit institution dedicated to historic preservation. It manages 11 properties in total, representing more than 250 years of social and architectural history in the city that was America's First Resort.

Further information on the Society can be found at <http://newportmansions.org/>.

Information on the other 18 museums that were accredited is available at <http://www.aam-us.org/pressreleases.cfm?mode=list&id=62>.

CurCom Web Site Update

Development of expanded features for the CurCom web site are progressing well. We hope to have the 'Members Only' section of the site launched this summer. Available on the new portion of the site will be a password-protected copy of the CurCom membership directory as well as the current issue of *CurCom Update*.

If you do not wish to be listed in the membership directory, please email the website Project Manager at kinval@aol.com and put 'curcom' in the subject area of your e-mail.

In the meantime, please visit the extensive web site pages already posted at www.curcom.org. We have added text and photographs of the wildly successful 'Best Practices in Exhibit Writing' marketplace session from the AAM Annual Meeting. This page contains a wealth of examples of juried writing samples for labels text.

Valarie Kinkade
Website Project Manager

(Continued from page 9)

Brian H. Peterson:

Curators are always supposed to be the ones who fight to the death for long, complex wall labels that only other curators really understand. But my feeling is that books and catalogues are the right place for research and scholarship. A museum exhibition is, more than anything else, an act of communication, and our job is to reach out to visitors and somehow hit them where they really live. As a reader I'm always grateful when, for example, a science writer doesn't assume too much specialized knowledge on my part, and takes the time to explain basic concepts and terms. Similarly, exhibition writers must always be aware that most people don't know too much about the subject matter, and need some help with the basics. An attitude of *generosity* toward the viewer is extremely important. At the same time, exhibit writers must somehow remain true to the genuine complexity of their subjects, and therein lies the tension with which we all must struggle.

Finally, exhibit writing to me must be cognizant of the most basic writing skills. Is there a good opening line that draws me in? Is there a clear thread that connects the ideas? Does the writer use stories, quotes, and other colorful devices that humanize the objects and their makers? Am I given both the necessary information and a possible pathway or two for an imaginative response? Is each word important? Exhibit writing is a creative act — albeit one that occurs within very strict limitations — and sometimes those very limitations seem to generate clever and beautiful results.

Vas Prabhu:

What do I look for in a label?

I appreciate exhibit labels that take risks and experiment with techniques. I look for a positive tone of voice, one that respects the reader, and that uses culturally sensitive and up-to-date language. I like it when the label poses a question, to help me look more closely. I appreciate quotes, and knowing who the writer is...Labels that make one key point or give me one interesting fact that I can then use to guide my viewing experience of the exhibition are really appreciated. Labels that use a good size font and are well lit are much appreciated!

Having worked in a variety of museums (children's museum; university art museum; contemporary art museum; fine arts museum) and as a person that enjoys visiting any type of museum, I always wonder about the process of writing the labels I am reading. How was the exhibit conceived? Who is the intended audience? At what point were the labels conceived? Who wrote the labels: An individual? A team? What constraints did the writers have? What other "reading" is available within the exhibition? Within the museum? I also observe visitors: do they read labels? For how long? Does it appear to help them understand the exhibition? If only they knew how complex the task is to write one good label!

And then finally, I am constantly humbled and energized by the possibility that I can always write a better label, next time! Kudos to these writers! I learned a lot.

(Continued on page 11)

Beverly Serrell:

I was looking for label text that was easy to read and understand: something that didn't require me to re-read it to comprehend the content, but that I may have wanted to re-read because it was so interesting, fun, or provocative. I wanted the label to flow easily from beginning to end, and to leave me with a sense of completion and satisfaction. I wanted to be glad I took the time to read it, that it was worthwhile.

Turn-ons: Texts that are clever, fresh, and make me feel intelligent.

Turn-offs: Chirpy, overly familiar labels — ones that use 'we' and 'you', give too many instructions to 'Look at this' or 'Notice that', and end with exclamation marks.

The ten winning entries were:

1. Organizing Institution: **Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage**
2. Exhibition Title: *Pattern Wizardry*
Organizing Institution: **Brooklyn Children's Museum**
3. Exhibition Title: *Sharks: Myth and Mystery*
Organizing Institution: **Monterey Bay Aquarium**
4. Exhibition Title: *The Story of We the People*
Organizing Institution: **National Constitution Center**
5. Exhibition Title: *El Greco to Picasso from the Phillips Collection*
Organizing Institution: **Denver Art Museum**
6. Exhibition Title: *Chicago Sports! You Shoulda Been There*
Organizing Institution: **Chicago Historical Society**
7. Exhibition Title: *Heroes and Villains of the Old West*
Organizing Institution: **Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave**
8. Exhibition Title: *Kid Stuff: Growing Up at Winterthur*
Organizing Institution: **Winterthur Museum**
9. Exhibition Title: *Across Time and Tundra: The Inuvialuit of the Canadian Arctic*
Organizing Institution: **Canadian Museum of Civilization**
10. Exhibition Title: *Try This! Body Language in Asian Art*
Organizing Institution: **San Diego Museum of Art**

Winning Entries Available for Display

The text panels of the winning entries for the 2004 Marketplace of Ideas competition that were displayed in New Orleans are available for display in other locations.

The display includes an introductory panel and the ten winning entry panels, each 24" x 20". Panels also include a brief exhibit description, excerpts of jurors' comments, and a related photograph that usually shows the label/text panel in its exhibit context.

A small crate is available for shipping.

The display is available at no charge, other than the cost of shipping the single crate by UPS.

Further details are available from Brian Peterson at James A. Michener Art Museum, 138 S. Pine Street, Doylestown PA 18901. Ph: (215) 340-9800, ext. 125; email www.michenerartmuseum.org

New Executive Director for California Association of Museums

The California Association of Museums has a new Executive Director, Celeste DeWald, following the resignation of Terri Knoll.

For the past six years, Celeste has worked as the Director of Education and Public Programs at the National Steinbeck Center, developing education programs and building community partnerships for a new museum in Salinas. She has also completed internships with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art and the San Jose Museum of Art.

Celeste graduated from John F. Kennedy University in Orinda with a Master's Degree in Museum Studies. While completing her degree, she was the Project Assistant for *Museum Mission Statements: Building a Distinct Institutional Identity*, edited by Gail Anderson and published by the American Association of Museums. Celeste was honored with the Outstanding Educator Award from the National Association for Interpretation. More recently, she participated in the American Association of Museum's International Partnerships Among Museums program in 2001 in conjunction with Casa-Museo La Sebastiana in Valparaiso, Chile.

The New England Museum Association Curators' Professional Affinity Group (PAG) assembled a panel of experts to present at its 2004 Spring Workshop titled: 'Chinese Export Art in Museum Decorative Arts Collections'. The Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, generously agreed to host this program on June 29, and to provide the expertise of staff members William Sargent and Karina Corrigan. Madelyn Shaw of the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design also presented. Topics included an introduction to the Chinese Export Trade with New England, and lectures covering ceramics, lacquer objects, fans, ivory carvings, and textiles. The Peabody Essex Museum provided behind-the-scenes tours of its collections storage areas and of Yin Yu Tang, a late Qing dynasty merchant's house brought to the PEM from southeastern China.

At the New England Museum Association's 2004 Annual Conference, the Curator's PAG is sponsoring a session titled 'Buy it Now! Museums and eBay', which examines the advantages, pitfalls, and ethics of using online auctions and the tricks to successful bidding on Ebay. The Curator's PAG lunch will examine ways in which to conduct collections research. Other sessions at the conference will examine the impact of research on collections management and interpretation, illegal art, and new media art and information technology in museum collections and exhibitions.

Please contact the New England Museum Association for more information on any of these programs.

Ron M. Potvin

Co-chair, New England Museum Association Curators' Professional Affinity Group

Historic Site Administrator, John Nicholas Brown Center
Providence, Rhode Island

Relationship between SPCs and AAM Discussed

A number of questions have recently come up about the relationship between Standing Professional Committees (SPCs) and AAM and how this relationship works in practice. These include issues ranging from how membership in SPCs relates to membership in AAM to which activities of SPCs should require the AAM's approval and which can be carried out autonomously.

Standing Professional Committees of AAM do not have independent standing as legal entities. They are a corporate part of AAM, and their overall practices and guidelines must be approved by the AAM Board of Directors. However, experience has indicated that a more comprehensive set of guidelines for SPCs is needed to clarify that relationship and protect AAM from legal liability.

Many times in the past we have treated SPCs as virtually independent entities. This is leading to difficult situations relating to issues where AAM might inadvertently be harmed by SPC actions, including legal liability and conflict of interest.

It is in AAM's best interest to address these questions as we go forward.

Currently there are a number of areas that need attention. These include:

1. Standards and Best Practices created by SPCs and their relation to AAM, including AAM approval, and how these 'best practices' relate to those articulated by the Accreditation Commission and/or ethical guidelines developed by the AAM Ethics Committee
2. Workshops and seminars held by SPCs. This includes contract issues (currently AAM *must* sign all contracts, but we are not always informed when an SPC holds an event); content issues: currently seminar or workshop content is not always reviewed or vetted by AAM staff; and date conflicts: sometimes SPC offerings conflict with AAM's offerings, and sometimes SPCs do not wish to hold their workshops at times AAM staff designates for such offerings.
3. Membership issues and how they relate to AAM institutional and individual membership requirements.
4. Fund-raising issues: how they raise funds; how they inform us; who carries out the legal requirements that protect our 501(c)(3) status.
5. Conflict of interest and private inurement questions.

There are also other issues raised by AAM's legal counsel, which have not yet been discussed or brought forward as areas of concern. In addition, there are issues surrounding how SPCs are created, how often they are reviewed by the Board, and whether the current difference between SPCs and Professional Interest Committees (PICs) is correctly delineated.

Recommendation

That the AAM Board appoint a task force (see right) to work together with staff and representatives of the SPCs to investigate and address these and other issues that may arise during the course of the task force's work, both from a legal, operational and policy standpoint. We want to proactively address the issues before they become difficulties.

Edward H. Able

SPC Task Force

Beth Twiss-Garrity (CARE) and Betty Brewer (MMC) have been selected as SPC representatives on the SPC Task Force. The Task Force will be chaired by Bill Eiland (Vice Chair of the AAM Board) and will also include four Board members.

All SPC Council members should communicate their thoughts to Beth and Betty. I would also hope that any Council members that have concerns about composition or role of the Task Force share them with me and I will do my best to get them heard in the appropriate places.

Janice Klein
Chair, SPC Council
Director, Mitchell Museum
of the American Indian
jklein@kendall.edu
www.mitchellmuseum.org

Exhibition Competition Update

New Book by Brian Peterson

The Cities, the Towns, the Crowds: The Paintings of Robert Spencer. James A. Michener Art Museum, July 2004

Robert Spencer was one of the most important painters associated with the Pennsylvania Impressionist art colony in Bucks County. Spencer made his reputation with skillful, evocative views of everyday life, often depicting the mills, tenements, and factories of New Hope and surrounding areas. He also painted the street life and waterfronts of New York City and France, and toward the end of his life experimented with modernist ideas as well as his own peculiar brand of history painting.

Brian Peterson has written a definitive study of Robert Spencer. He explores Spencer's colorful yet tragic life, using as sources the written recollections of his two daughters as well as extensive new research. He examines the artist's work in depth, and includes excerpts from his correspondence with Duncan Phillips, press articles, and reviews.

Peterson's book complements an exhibition of the same name at the James A. Michener Art Museum, Doylestown, PA, featuring more than 45 works by Spencer. It can be seen until September 19 2004.

Thanks to the hard work of our judges, SPC chairs, fantastic entrants, and a streamlined entry process, the 16th Annual Exhibition Competition was a great success.

The competition is the joint project of four of AAM's Standing Professional Committees: the Curators' Committee (CurCom), the National Association for Museum Exhibition (NAME), the Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation (CARE), and the Education Committee (EdCom).

The judges for this year were Lin Nelson-Mayson for CurCom, Whitney Watson for NAME, Ellen Guisti and Keni Sturgeon for CARE and Sonnet Takahisa for EdCom.

This year, there were 22 entrants representing a wide range of institutions and exhibition topics. Five winners were chosen from this group – one was selected as an overall winner and four were selected as being outstanding for specific reasons. Information on the winners will soon be available on the CurCom web site.

Our new entry process provides more direction and specificity to entrants. In past years, the lack of clear direction to entrants in the entry instructions caused confusion for both entrants and judges and resulted in entries that were all over the map in terms of quality and quantity of materials. This year, we attempted to standardize our process by requiring all entries to be in 3" binders divided by tabs. Each section of the binder addressed a specific entry requirement (floorplan, narrative, walkthrough, etc.). As a result of this approach, the entrants found it easier to assemble and present the key materials and the judges were able to compare 'apples to apples' in terms of content. Judges and entrants alike reported that this was a huge improvement.

Of course, there is always room for improvement! We will continue to refine the entry process for next year. We will also be revising the standards that judges use to evaluate excellence. Any suggestions for changes are welcome.

Please consider entering next year's competition and encourage others to do so! Entry materials will be available in the late summer.

Gretchen Overhiser

Help Restore NSF Informal Science Education Funding

Last year Congress approved \$62.5 million for the Informal Science Education (ISE) program at the National Science Foundation (NSF). For FY 2005 NSF has only requested \$50 million for ISE — a \$12.5 million (20%) reduction.

For more than twenty years, ISE-funded projects have promoted public interest, understanding, and engagement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics through voluntary, self-directed, and lifelong learning opportunities. ISE projects reach audiences of all ages and backgrounds across the nation in a variety of out-of-the-classroom settings, including science centers and museums. Perhaps most importantly, these investments in informal science education pay dividends by sparking an interest in science and math at an early age—the surest way we have to produce more scientists here at home.

What you can do:

AAM MAT members who are represented by House and Senate Appropriators, especially VA-HUD Sub-committee members, should send an email or fax to their elected officials and explain how critical ISE funding is to your institution's ability to serve their constituents and the public. Ask your legislators to approve NSF-ISE funding at the FY 2004 level of \$62.5 million. Let legislators know your museum's unique and important role in your community and the specific ways the museum can or has used ISE funding to serve citizens and visitors from the district and beyond. The federal government must continue its tradition of fiscal support for the efforts of museums in creating a nation of lifelong learners and protecting and preserving our scientific, natural and cultural heritage.

Consider inviting your elected officials to visit your museum with their family to see firsthand the work you do for your community and their constituents.

Increases for NEA and NEH Approved

The U.S. House of Representatives voted 241-185 on June 16 in favor of a bipartisan amendment, sponsored by the Congressional Arts Caucus, to increase FY 2005 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) by \$10 million and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) by \$3.5 million.

Arts Caucus co-chairs Reps. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) and Chris Shays (R-NY) joined with the ranking member of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, Rep. Norm Dicks (D-WA), and Rep. Jim Leach (R-IA) to offer the amendment. The increase brings the House recommended funding level of \$130.9 million for the NEA and \$141.8 million for the NEH.

Mid-Atlantic Region News

The Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums has announced the keynote speakers and preliminary program for its annual meeting, from October 15 to 19 in Philadelphia (refer Conferences, Meetings and Workshops, p.19).

MAAM is seeking nominations for The Katherine Coffey Award, which is given each year to an individual in the Mid-Atlantic region as a way of recognizing distinguished achievement in the museum field. Nominees should have worked as a paid museum professional for at least 10 years in a principal position. All nomination materials should be sent by July 15 2004 to: Coffey Award Committee Chair Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums, 800 East Lombard Street Baltimore, MD 21202-4511.

The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts has announced a workshop on fundraising for conservation. In order to provide optimum care for your collections, should you invest in planning? In stabilizing the environment? In cataloging and describing? In digitization? Or in conservation treatment? The workshop will be held on July 19 2004 at the McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. The registration fee is \$90. For additional information contact Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA), 264 South 23rd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103, 215-545-0613.

PEER REVIEW: CULTIVATE AN INFORMED STAFF

EdCom Newsletter Now On-line

The Education Committee (EdCom) of the American Association of Museums is pleased to announce that its spring 2004 online newsletter has been posted on the EdCom Web site.

Go to <http://www.edcom.org/newsletter/> to read this very full newsletter, which includes EdCom Regional Reports, The Critical Link E-Newsletter, and articles on the 2004 EdCom Executive Board Election and School Standards Survey for EdCom Members.

Could your museum use some fresh ideas? Do you wonder how other museums are addressing the same concerns you have? Is your staff up-to-date on standards and best practices in the museum field?

Encourage your staff to become peer reviewers with AAM. Peer reviewers frequently tell us they have learned something new from their review to bring back to their home institution.

'There are always good ideas, in all areas of museum operations that might be discovered through doing a review', says Linda Mansperger, Executive Director, Historic Spanish Point, Gulf Coast Heritage Association, FL.

Peer reviewers support the Museum Assessment Program and Accreditation Program of AAM by contributing 40-60 hours to review self-study materials, conduct a site visit, and write an evaluative report for each review undertaken.

Lyndel King, Executive Director, The Fredrick R. Weisman Art Center, University of Minnesota, MN, states 'Site visits provide me the opportunity to see other institutions that I would never be able to visit otherwise. I always come back to my own institution with great ideas for programs and for solving problems of staffing, facilities, and finances. Another direct benefit to my museum is building up a network of colleagues. I've exchanged exhibitions with a number of colleagues I've met through visits. I have a network of people to call when I am facing specific thorny issues.'

Peer review demands skills in analysis, problem solving, and communication as well as a high level of professional knowledge and experience. Eligibility requirements, position description, and application information can be found on the web at www.aam-us.org. For further information, contact: Karen Bellnier, Peer Reviewer Manager, 202/218-7688; email peer-review@aam-us.org.

Taskforce on Museums and Diversity

At the AAM Board Meeting in November 2003 the Diversity Coalition, an AAM administrative committee, presented an application for status as a Standing Professional Committee (SPC). In response to the Board's call for a greater context in which to discuss not only the SPC application but the recently identified strategic issue of diversity, AAM's Board chair appointed a Taskforce on Museums and Diversity. The resultant group of twenty-two individuals comprised of AAM staff, AAM Board members, museum professionals, DivCo co-chairs, and diversity experts from the non-profit field met at AAM on 9 February 2004 to identify realistic and attainable goals for moving the museum field forward and building leadership capacity.

The AAM Board subsequently discussed the Taskforce recommendations and made the following decisions:

Recommendation 1 - Diversity will be incorporated as the Board addresses future AAM planning.

Recommendation 2 - In developing AAM's budget for FY 2005, consideration will be given to the human and financial resources that will be required to carry out the tasks outlined in the Taskforce's Timeline for Diversity Goals

Recommendation 3 – The Board deferred appointing a high level advisory body until after its planning retreat in July 2004.

Recommendation 4 - Provisional approval was granted for the creation of the Standing Professional Committee for Diversity.

The leadership of the newly formed SPC was requested to review their proposed guidelines to make sure they are as inclusive as possible, and was asked to develop an articulated plan for the SPC which is in alignment and operates in tandem with other AAM diversity goals/strategies.

Position Available

Curator of Exhibitions ExhibitsUSA

The Curator of Exhibitions identifies and implements new traveling exhibitions for ExhibitsUSA. This Curator represents EUSA at conferences and site visits, is the liaison with exhibition organizers, and requires clear, detailed, and timely communication. The Curator reports to the Director of ExhibitsUSA.

Responsibilities: identify exhibition proposals; coordinate exhibition development, budgets, and timelines; work with curators, lenders, and host institutions; and assist with questions of exhibition contents and tour.

Qualifications: Ph.D. or equivalent experience in art history, applied history, or museum studies. Excellent communication, writing, and project management skills; three to five years experience in a museum or related environment; and a successful record of project management. Candidates must have a general knowledge of museum theory, practice, and operations. Full-time, open immediately, start date negotiable, competitive salary and benefits. Review of applicants will continue until the position is filled. Send letter of interest, resume, writing sample and three references to:

Lin Nelson-Mayson, Director,
ExhibitsUSA, 912 Baltimore
Ave, Suite 700, Kansas City,
MO 64105; or lin@eusa.org.

Conferences, Meetings and Workshops

'Nobody Does it Better: California Success Stories'
CAM 2004 Annual Conference
Santa Rosa and Napa Valley, CA
July 21-23 2004

This year's conference will showcase 'best practices' that can be adapted to other museums' needs throughout the state. These models will be presented in a 'model' format allowing application to a variety of situations. Delegates will be invited to 'taste' a multitude of model programs and select what is useful to their respective institutions.

For additional information or a registration form, visit www.calmuseums.org.

Society of American Archivists' Annual Meeting
Boston, MA
August 2-8 2004

Interested in how the USA PATRIOT Act can affect your repository and the patron records you keep? Wondering what policies and procedures eBay has in place to deal with stolen materials offered for sale on its Web site? Need concrete suggestions for dealing with a sizable backlog? Then check out the program for Boston 2004 — you won't be disappointed!

See <http://www.archivists.org/conference/boston2004/boston2004.asp> for further information.

Visitor Studies Association Annual Meeting
Albuquerque, NM
August 3-7 2004

The meeting will address themes such as techniques in exhibit and program evaluation, statistical analysis, front-end studies, questionnaire design, label-writing, market research, designing for visitor conversations, integration of theory and practice, interviewing techniques, cultural diversity,

responding to RFP's, evaluating web-based activities and designing multi-media programs.

Refer www.visitorstudies.org for program updates.

'Rooms With a View: House Museums and their Surroundings'
DEM HIST Conference
Berlin
September 1-4 2004

This conference will focus on the urban house museum and its social environment as well as the historic house park in suburban settings.

Other relevant topics may include security issues, conservation strategies as regards public events and the public function of historic house museums.

All curators, directors, museums professionals and those with an interest in the preservation and interpretation of historic house museums are invited to attend.

The conference will take place immediately in advance of the annual conference, also in Berlin, of ICOM-ICDAD, the International Committee of Decorative Arts and Design.

DEM HIST is the ICOM International Committee for Historic House Museums. Established in 1999, it has hosted a range of international conferences (Genoa, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Switzerland) and works to form professional links across the historic house museum sector internationally.

For further information contact Sibylle Hoiman, Stiftung Schlosser und Garten Berlin-Brandenburg Postfach 601462, 14414 Potsdam; email s.hoiman@spsg.de. See also <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/termine/id=2669>.

'Exploring Resources for Growth'
AASLH Annual Meeting
St. Louis, MO
September 29-October 2 2004

In the midst of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Celebration, we are reminded of the impact these explorers brought to the growth of our nation. They came back with knowledge for new directions. Through exploration using research, evaluation, analysis, benchmarking, and experimentation, historical organizations will find resources to expand their services.

Further information is available at <http://www.aaslh.org/anmeeting.htm>.

'Museums and Intangible Heritage'
20th General Conference of ICOM
Seoul, Korea
October 2-8 2004

The unique cultural heritage of the different parts of the world is made in the process of invention, dissemination, acculturation, and devolution.

The worldwide museum community now recognizes that it will have to pay significant attention to intangible non-material information as well as tangible resources by fostering interdisciplinary approaches. Intangible heritage includes voices, values, traditions, languages, oral history, folk life, creativity, adaptability and the distinctiveness of a people popularly perceived through the manifestations of cuisine, clothing, shelter, traditional skills and technologies, religious ceremonies, manners, customs, performing arts, and story-telling.

The theme 'Museums and Intangible Heritage' will both help to promote the cultural identities of all regions in the world and to develop and understanding of the cultural diversity in the global society.

Refer <http://www.icom2004.org/program.htm> for updated details of the program.

'Strong Winds, Big Sails: Charting your Future'

Western Museums Association
2004 Annual Meeting
Tacoma / Seattle, WA
October 6-10 2004

With limited resources we present programs, curate collections, and collaborate with others, the 'wind' propelling our sails. The infrastructure that we create must have a strong mast in which to connect to our communities, establish strategic partnerships, and fulfill our missions. In a constantly changing and challenging environment, what new ways can we find to establish relevance? What are the tried and true practices that steer us on a steady course? What balance between the two is necessary to stimulate and sustain the desired level of activity?

Sessions will soon be finalized. Details will be available at <http://www.westmuse.org/>.

'Connecting to Our Community & Our Future'

British Columbia Museums
Association Conference
Nanaimo, BC
October 15-18 2004

The conference will consider four themes:

- Sustainability through Innovation
- Connections to Community
- Tourism Growth and Connections
- Connecting Core Competencies

Further information is available at <http://www.museumsassn.bc.ca>.

'In Museums we Trust'

Mid-Atlantic Association of
Museums Annual Meeting
Philadelphia, PA
October 15 to 19 2004

Keynote speakers will include Sarah Vowell, a contributing editor to National Public Radio's *This American Life* (heard nationally on 300 stations), and the author of *Radio On, Take the Cannoli* and most recently *The Partly Cloudy Patriot*; Jeffrey Rudolph, President & CEO of the California Science Center in Los Angeles and current board chair of the American Association of Museums; and David Carr, whose book *The Promise of*

Cultural Institutions has been described as 'offering profound insight into the necessity for great institutions in civil society'.

The program also features the 2004 Museum Resource Center, with over 45 museum vendors; the 'Technology Track', a new initiative that enables museum professionals to make the best use of technology, from beginner to advanced; and the Annual Exhibition Review, a lively discussion about the exhibitions at the new National Constitution Center.

See <http://www.cmiregistration.com/user/org/category.jsp?id=6291&org=231> for further details.

'The Museum, the Baby, and the Bathwater: Authenticity in the Information Age'

New England Museums Association
Conference
Burlington, VT
October 27-29 2004

Even as society confronts a seemingly bewildering digital future, its museums are widely held to be trusted, safe, and authentic keepers of culture, history, art, and science. How can museums build upon that public trust? How do we embrace the reality of the digital age without rejecting what has worked in the past? How do we ensure that contemporary culture continues to value transformative experience in the presence of real objects and thoughtful interpretation.

Further information is available at <http://www.nemanet.org/conf04.html>

'Masters and Commanders: the Best from Virginia's Museums'

Virginia Association of Museums
Annual Conference
Portsmouth, VA
March 13-15 2005

This year's conference program committee has chosen to focus sessions and workshops on best practices — what is working in museums of all sizes and types, and the goals we should all strive for in order to achieve excellence. Best practices include innovative programming that brings in new

audiences, creative earned income solutions, effective collaborations with other institutions, and much more. As we begin to see the end of the current economic downturn, it is time to look toward the future, and help each other determine the best way to use what resources we have.

Further information is available at <http://www.vamuseums.org/2005.pdf>.

'Politics and Positioning'

Museums Australia National
Conference
Sydney, Australia
May 1-4 2005

How should we position our institutions at the local, regional, national & international level in the future?

'Politics and Positioning' will explore the opportunities and challenges facing museums as they seek to re-invent and revitalize the sector in a time of contradiction and change. The issues facing collections from digital technology and concerns about on-going sustainability, the shifting focus to audience needs and accessibility, and the 'claiming' of the museum by an increasing range of stakeholders and interest groups, raise questions about the position of museums in the 21st century, about identity and power, about permanence and change.

The Historians' Special Interest Group of Museums Australia invites papers on this theme for its conference sessions until the end of August. Further details are available from dtoutsm@museum.vic.gov.au.

Further information about the Conference is available at <http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/conference2005/>.

'Museums at the Crossroads'

AAM Annual Meeting
Indianapolis, IN
May 1-5 2005

Further information will soon be available at <http://www.aam-us.org/am05/>

Springsteen – Troubadour of the Highway

Newark, NJ – The first major exhibition devoted to rock and roll legend Bruce Springsteen opened at The Newark Museum on June 17. 'Springsteen – Troubadour of the Highway' is a multi-media exhibition that explores the recording artist's use of cars and highways as motifs in his music and in related visual imagery.

More than 70 original photographs by a range of artists parallel the singer's musical imagery. The exhibition includes videos, recorded music, lyrics, vinyl albums and other memorabilia.

Springsteen: Troubadour of the Highway is organized by the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, and was curated by Colleen Sheehy, Director of



Education. In-kind support is provided by Columbia Records/Sony Music and Nardulli Photo Lab, Los Angeles.

'Springsteen – Troubadour of the Highway' can be seen until August 29.

Photo courtesy Newark Museum. Photographer: Frank Stefanko

AMERICAN  ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

CURCOM

UPDATE

Elisa G. Phelps / AAM Curators' Committee
130 Davis Court
San Antonio, TX 78209

