

NOS es particularmente grato presentar por primera vez en nuestra publicación la voz de la Museología norteamericana y sus preocupaciones presentes, a través de la palabra escrita de Selma Holo, siempre interesada en nuestra cultura.

La autora, nos manda un escrito, donde se refleja la preocupación de vincular a nuestros públicos, con los gestores mismos del museo, estableciendo un diálogo enriquecedor y vivificante para ambas partes. Es en realidad el interés que hemos tenido en esta Gaceta de Museos, al proponer lo que hemos llamado el Museo Dialogal. Las palabras sencillas y elocuentes de la compañera norteamericana, nos comunican todos estos importantes aspectos, sin los cuales el museo actual, creemos nosotros, no podrá sobrevivir sino como monumento frío a la cultura, siendo paulatinamente abandonado por el público.

Selma Holo, siempre interesada por el mundo hispánico ha escrito un importante libro, considerando las repercusiones políticas, en las acciones de los museos, tomando el interesante caso de la España posfranquista y su rápida transformación democrática. Recomendamos ampliamente la lectura de este interesante libro, que en muchos aspectos, queda vinculado a nuestras preocupaciones y realidades latinoamericanas.¹

Damos la bienvenida a Selma Holo como nuestra colaboradora, haciéndose presente en ella, ese importante e interesante fenómeno de simbiosis cultural de nuestras zonas fronterizas, tanto las norteamericanas con nuestro mundo, como las nuestras hacia los Estados Unidos. La autora del presente artículo, colabora directamente con la Universidad del Sur de California y el interés por estos procesos culturales que señalamos, le son evidentes porque en ellos convive.

GACETA DE MUSEOS
C.N.A.E. -I.N.A.H



CARTA DE LA COSTA OESTE
(Estados Unidos de Norte América)

Esta es la versión de una lectura que ofrecí a un grupo de curadores y educadores, de un museo principal (mayor) en la parte oeste de los Estados Unidos, quienes fueron invitados para contemplar las nuevas estrategias de montaje en función de sus museos, los cuales se están expandiendo.

La conferencia refleja intereses recientes y cambios en cuanto a la actitud, que son comunes a través del país, pero que quizá son más explícitos en el oeste, donde la tradición es menos sacralizada y el cambio es, también, menos temido.

Varios museos en los Estados Unidos han sido confrontados con oportunidades sin precedentes para reinventarse a sí mismos. Estas oportunidades son, especialmente en museos con algún grado de financiamientos públicos, dadas en la necesidad de activar el acceso a públicos más diversos, a los cuales nuestros museos requieren atender. Los museos del este, incluyendo aquellos de San Diego hasta Arizona, de Los Ángeles hasta Seattle, han tenido, en años recientes, que reimaginar el sentido de sus misiones para incluir a sus diversos públicos. Esto se ha logrado, frecuentemente, mediante la construcción o el recondicionamiento de un plan de expansión de los espacios educativos y otros eventos que implican mayores responsabilidades y que confrontan la carga tradicional de coleccionar, preservar y exhibir piezas, arte y material de la cultura. Reconsiderar los roles de los museos incluye el uso de múltiples estrategias de interpretación, una actitud hacia el público que aliente la interactividad y la aceptación de que un museo no sólo debe ser educativo y que puede ser, también en una porción, entretenimiento. Los museos implican la reflexión acerca de la naturale-

za cambiante de los recintos antes de que, de hecho, se construyan estos espacios, por eso me dirijo a ustedes.

Cuando fui invitada para hablarles hoy, tuve que hacer una búsqueda del alma con el objetivo de tener una respuesta satisfactoria y de cómo podría serles útil a ustedes mientras contemplan su propio papel en la sociedad.

Sí, he escrito un libro acerca del rol de los museos en cuanto a la promoción de una sociedad más democrática y pienso que este papel es especialmente vital en un tiempo en el que el pensamiento crítico en la esfera pública está siendo cada vez más minimizado por una educación inferior proveniente de nuestras escuelas públicas. También cuando se da un análisis mínimo en el entrenamiento y en la evaluación de la cultura visual que nos confronta desde todos los lados. Ésta es la norma.

Puesto que los museos son el lugar «LOCI» de la mejor manifestación del pensamiento visual y de las sensaciones, el museo tiene una tremenda obligación de ser el sitio en el cual las ideas visuales sobre la cultura visual puedan no solamente proliferar sino también inspirar ese pensamiento crítico tan necesario hoy en día. Lo que es impresionante sobre un museo es que el público es invitado a la «exposición» conjuntamente con artistas, intelectuales y burócratas del mundo artísti-

April 10, 2001

Susan Mills
President and CEO and Museum Director
Director of the Ikon Gallery, the University's Art Museum
University of Southern California
Los Angeles

"Letter from the West Coast"

This is a version of an address I delivered to a group of curators, the curators of a major museum in the Western United States, who requested a paper museum in the Western United States. The address was given in a lecture hall at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, on April 10, 2001. The address was given in a lecture hall at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, on April 10, 2001. The address was given in a lecture hall at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, on April 10, 2001.

These museums in the Western States have been forced with unprecedented responsibilities in the Western United States. The public's changing perception of the need to activate better spaces for the new and existing public in the Western United States. The public's changing perception of the need to activate better spaces for the new and existing public in the Western United States. The public's changing perception of the need to activate better spaces for the new and existing public in the Western United States.

What I am invited to speak to you today I had to be very sensitive in order to be as much a well-liked speaker.

For myself about how I might be able to do this. I am invited to speak to you today I had to be very sensitive in order to be as much a well-liked speaker. For myself about how I might be able to do this. I am invited to speak to you today I had to be very sensitive in order to be as much a well-liked speaker. For myself about how I might be able to do this. I am invited to speak to you today I had to be very sensitive in order to be as much a well-liked speaker.

co. Y lo que es todavía más admirable de esta invitación es que comienza con pedirles que utilicen sus ojos para evaluar no textos, pero sí trabajos de cultura material.

Así, pues, para contestar mis propias preguntas, les digo que yo represento un puente con un pie en la academia y otro en el museo, por ello puedo dirigirme a ustedes desde ambos mundos y entiendo sus objetivos, los retos que están por delante y sus aspiraciones. Puedo, también, simpatizar con sus obstáculos.

El trabajo que desarrollo se relaciona con casi todos ustedes en el sentido de que mi trabajo consiste en la educación de profesionales del museo. Muchos quienes trabajan con ustedes en esta institución y por lo tanto traigo mi experiencia a ustedes desde la academia, no obstante que estoy dispuesta a aprender de ustedes, mientras se intenta reinventar el museo para así honrar valores antiguos y darle la bienvenida a algunos nuevos. Por lo tanto, estoy también preparada para repensar la educación del "nuevo" profesional del museo, en uno que pueda más efectivamente servir a los valores que van evolucionando en un medio ambiente más completo.

El primer pensamiento que me gustaría comunicarles tiene la forma de una advertencia. Sé que el trabajo de la universidad y todos sus teóricos pesa monumentalmente sobre ustedes, mientras proceden el repensar las instalaciones de sus colecciones permanentes; pero la advertencia que les traigo es curiosamente una bandera roja sobre la academia en sí.

No se dejen seducir por ellos. No los aman ni aman tampoco lo que ustedes representan, han emplazado una batalla que ustedes representan. Es más, no les importa el público, y el objeto material no es de

mayor valor para ellos. Toda retórica a un lado, les prometo que esto es cierto; me preocupa que los museos en Estados Unidos tienen demasiado miedo para admitir y clamar por sus diferencias, y se sienten cada vez más obligados a acomodar las modas cada vez más recientes del pensamiento intelectual, y de halagar, por así decirlo, las minifaldas de la mente. Una cosa es aprender del mundo del pensamiento que la universidad representa y otra subordinarse a él.

Los museos deben recordar que ellos poseen los objetos, deben por lo tanto, proteger, desarrollar y promover un medio único de expresión, porque lo que representan sobrevivirá la teoría del día "por siglos".

Sea que los objetos bajo su cuidado sean objetos coleccionados del pasado o de nuestro propio tiempo, éstos tienen una potencialidad que siempre queremos apoyar y tenemos que hacerlo estimulando las capacidades sensoriales, intelectuales del observador no especializado (porque el especialista no necesita de nuestra ayuda y seducción).

Tenemos un poder enorme en el construir el conocimiento (como Eileen Hooper-Greenhill ha escrito, con elocuencia, en su libro *Museos y la construcción del conocimiento*). Debemos ejercitarlos en una manera que rinda o no a las obras de arte que representamos. Esto no significa que ignoremos teorías brillantes mientras se transfieren de la academia, pero más bien significa que los museos deben retener una conciencia de que las teorías que consideran deben pasar las pruebas de la realidad.

Las exposiciones de los museos, especialmente de las colecciones permanentes, no deben caer en la trampa de ser ilustraciones de mejor académicas, si su exposición reciente fuera mejor como libro, produzcanlo como tal.

Las exhibiciones de las colecciones permanentes no tienen que ser como las temporales. Las exposiciones temporales tiene su propia teatralidad

imperativa y yo digo: déjenlas rodar a su ritmo. Ellas tienen otro papel, parte del cual es ayudar a conseguir financiamientos para las colecciones permanentes, instalaciones y las menos populares pero igualmente significativas, exhibiciones que vienen fuera de las permanentes. De cualquier manera, creo que esto es una obligación contra la novedosa estrategia concebida más abiertas para las exposiciones permanentes y revelarles a sus públicos de dónde provienen las ideas y dónde yacen en sus ámbitos político, social y artístico. Esto constituiría la democratización de un museo y, por extensión, una contribución a la educación de una ciudadanía más responsable y democrática. Lo que puede constituir un medio (o un significativo) para constituir y promover el pensamiento crítico que relate el mundo del arte y el de la imaginación, la naturaleza de la creatividad, y para la riqueza y viabilidad de nuestras vidas culturales ciudadanas.

Por lo tanto, me gustaría retar esta llamada por un agrandamiento de la autoridad del museo, mencionado en un artículo en el número reciente de la revista *The New York Times*, del autor de ese artículo horrorizado de que quizá existieran mis contribuciones en la sección de dibujo de la Institución Getty, sintió que el museo debería de haber sacado inmediatamente de la vista los trabajos, para así mantener la fe del público en el museo. Por otra parte, no creo que los museos deban cubrir todo conocimiento; más bien creo que necesitan admitir la duda ocasional cuando, digámoslo, la autenticidad de ciertos objetos está puesta en duda. De hecho, se puede voltear esa duda en una experiencia educativa para el visitante, al motivar preguntas o al demostrar la evidencia con la que el museo tiene que luchar. Estoy, por lo tanto, pidiéndole a los museos que entren en diálogo con sus públicos en lugar de siempre aleccionarlos; estoy llamando a más transparencia en nuestros museos. El público simplemente estaría más interesado en nosotros, nos pertenecería más si les dejáramos saber qué es lo que está sucediendo de tiempo en tiempo. Véanlo de esta manera, nosotros en el

mundo de la historia del arte somos «el grupo de adentro», gente en el interior por excelencia. Nos toca conocer todas las historias y todos los escándalos, los temas sobre atribuciones, iconografías,

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No seremos una parte vital de las vidas de nuestras visitas.

Las posturas autoritarias serán nuestra deshechura...

el nerviosismo sobre la proveniencia, la verdad de las influencias artísticas y las razones por las cuales se hacen y se rompen leyes en relación con la propiedad cultural.

Pero nunca queremos compartir ninguna de estas historias con nuestras visitas, especialmente si son quisquillosas. ¿Por qué? Porque no confiamos en el público. Creemos que el mismo, del que somos responsables, necesita ser condescendido y convidado. Pienso que el museo del futuro debe permitir maneras de dejar gente entrar, en lugar de insistir en la vieja autoridad excluyente. Debemos confrontarnos en conversaciones con el público, si no lo hacemos, nos convertiremos en sí en un simple espectáculo. Solventaremos nuestro deber y no más. No seremos una parte vital de las vidas de nuestras visitas. Las posturas autoritarias serán nuestra deshechura, mientras las actividades del mundo del arte continúan haciéndose más transparentes.

Por favor, tomen nota de que no estoy argumentando a favor de un coctel de perspectivas múltiples en un solo montaje. No estoy empujando el abordar todas las historias posibles que quepan en una agenda curatorial. Esto simplemente crearía un caos, pero creo que esta apertura selectiva puede ser construida a partir de la creación de espacios subordinados con pedestales y nichos que complementen y estén junto a los montajes bellos y tradicionales de los objetos. Esos espacios especiales podrían incorporar tecnología permitiendo al visitante que tuviera inclinaciones para privatizar su experiencia al alternar perspectivas y elecciones museológicas sobre los objetos, a los problemas especiales referentes a los objetos sin confundir ninguna exposición en particular. Así los visitantes podrían convertirse en gente del «interior», en el sentido de que así podrían aprender que los equipos educativo y curatorial están siempre haciendo elecciones sobre lo que es más interesante o más importante con respecto a cualquier objeto o grupo de objetos. Y el visitante podría aprender que hay todavía otras maneras de pensar sobre estos objetos, y que ellos mismos, inclusive, podrían tener ideas que las afectarían. Estos pedestales o nichos podrían ser flexibles y transformables en la medida de que ideas nuevas se filtraran al discurso artístico e histórico. Sin embargo, lo que contienen no debería ser permitido; yo creo, que el valorar a los objetos mismos en tales espacios especiales aligerarían (salvaguardarían) evitarían que los curadores tuvieran que enlodar sus montajes con demasiadas perspectivas o demasiado material contextual. La meta sería enriquecer la experiencia del visitante.

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Otra de las cosas que necesitamos pensar sobre hoy son las maneras alternativas de presentar las colecciones permanentes a la luz del contexto social de nuestra región y de nuestras culturas extendidas. Se está poniendo gran cuidado precisamente porque el contexto social está cambiando constante y radicalmente; por lo tanto, aunque uno quiera honrar su contexto social, el número infinito de maneras de acercarse a dichos contextos puede ser contradictorio y al final poco lúcido. Cada vez más la plétora de contextos posibles puede ser problemática; por ejemplo, cuando se trata con arte precolombino en una colección de los Estados

Unidos, uno podría escoger presentarla en un sinnúmero de maneras, podría ser altamente contextualizada dentro del modelo social nacionalista que México por mucho tiempo ha promovido, o podría ser leído como parte de una contribución artística más amplia; una parte integral del teatro de la imaginación, tal como está en el Museo Británico, o puede ser montada como eligió Rufino Tamayo en su museo de Oaxaca como aventura EN-TERPRICE estética pura y singular. Una metodología concentrada en probar que el arte precolombino puede mantener su lugar sin

la necesidad de explicarla o apoyarla etnológicamente. Puede ser también concebida como un montaje que necesita ser mostrado en algunas o todas de estas variadas combinaciones pero, el contexto que se adopte, sí necesita ser evidenciado como las elecciones que son. Recuerden que el público está todavía sorprendido cuando aprende que no tal cosa como una exposición neutral. Nosotros en el mundo del museo pensamos que es viejo cuento indicar esto, pero el público en general está fascinado por esta idea. Es importante

in coming they differ from the university and that they
technology obliges to accommodate the most recent findings
to intellectual thought - to do the work of the mind, as it
is more. It is no thing to learn from the world of thought
that merely represents, and another to be subjected to it.
Museum must remember that they possess the objects. They must
therefore present, describe, and present a careful mode of
exhibition because what they represent will outline the "history"
of the objects. Whether they are objects of art or objects of
science collected from the past or from our own time, they have a
great value because they are the only means of seeing the
material and intellectual capacities in the non-
specificity of the museum. We have an enormous power to shape
the way the visitor sees the objects. We have an enormous power
equally in Museum and the Shaping of Knowledge and we must
remember that ability wisely, and we must remember that we
must be in a way that honors the work of art we represent.
This does not mean ignoring the objects. It means that we must
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As a permanent collection exhibitions have to be in compliance
with the law, the museum's mission, and the
They have another role, part of which is to help support
facilities for the permanent collection. Other
institutions and the less popular but equally significant focus
exhibitions that come out of the permanent collection. Other
I believe it is located upon the newly conceived permanent
exhibitions bring to work equally mean to its public where
the idea for any particular display come from and where its
political, social or artistic agenda lie. It would constitute
a description of the museum and, by extension, a contribution
to the relation of a more responsible and growing critical thinking
in the world of art, to the world of art, to the richness and
visibility of our city's cultural life. Thus, I would challenge the
call for an appreciation of the authority of the museum.

prepared by an article in a recent issue of the *New York Times*
Magazine. The author of that article, horrified that there might
be some mysterious, hidden away drawings, apartments, said
that the museum ought to have immediately taken the works off
view in order to maintain access to the museum. I, on the other
hand, do not believe that museums have to be all-knowing.
I believe I believe they must be able to do all-knowing.
Let's say, the authenticity of certain objects is questioned,
I believe, that we must turn them into an educational experience
for the visitor by raising the questions, by demonstrating the
evidence that the museum has to create with. I am therefore
asking museums to enter into dialogue with their audiences
instead of trying to hide things. I am asking for more
transparency in our museums. The public would only become more
concerned in our museums, if we would let them
know what is really going on from time to time.

You see, we in the world of art history and museums are supreme
Pruders. We get to know all the stories and all the scandals;
the questions about authenticity, the problems of iconography, the
relationships about provenance, the truth about artists,
influences, and the reasons for lines made and broken with respect
to cultural properties. But, we never want to share any of those
stories with our visitors, especially if they are teachy ones.
Why? Because we don't trust the public; we believe that the very
public to us we are responsible needs to be protected and
concealed to. I think the museum of the future has to permit
ways of letting people in rather than insisting on the old
exclusive authority. We must engage in conversations with the
public. If we don't, we will become merely spectators; we will
fulfill our duty and no more. We will not become a vital part
of our visitors' lives. Authoritarian stances will be our undoing
as the workings of the art world continue to become more
transparent.

Please note that I am not arguing for a jangle of multiple
perspectives in any single display. I am not arguing for telling
every story that is available. That would only create
confusion. But, I believe this selective "opening up" can be done
with the creation of new history spaces, that will put visitors
adjacent to or near the traditional beautiful displays of the
objects. This means that the visitor would be able to see the
enabling the visitor who was so inclined to become privy to
alternate perspectives, to alternative museological choices about

recordar que no puedes dejar satisfecho a todas las personas todo el tiempo. Un indígena zapoteca que vive en Los Ángeles, un historiador educado en Oxford, Inglaterra, que visita la ciudad; un espectador anglo medio sin ningún interés especial en el arte; tanto como un mexicano citadino, responderán todos a interpretaciones diferentes acerca del arte precolombino y en ningún caso estarán satisfechos. Lo que quiero decir es que no hay límites en las maneras a nuestra disposición para alcanzar (llegar) a nuestras comunidades extendidas a través de los museos de arte, y tampoco existen límites para las maneras políticamente apropiadas para hacerlo. Debemos trabajar con los objetos tal como lo habíamos justificado, pero debemos admitir en nuestras propias agendas y darle la bienvenida a aquellos otros mediante el uso del libro de comentarios o estaciones computarizadas donde el público pueda registrar sus perspectivas. Necesitamos pensar sobre los paneles didácticos, por ejemplo, no difuminar el sentido de alta autoridad con el que están escritos.

Es más, estoy convencida, de que la integridad de cualquier museo, especialmente un museo enciclopédico estará cuidada envuelta en su habilidad para argumentar visualmente que una especie de recubrimiento que se expande en compasará los mejores trabajos de todas las civilizaciones. El museo no debe tener miedo en argumentar a favor de la calidad y recuerden, el contexto no es la cosa, el contexto es SOBRE la cosa. El contexto cambiará tan rápido como lo proclames, así si el contexto está de sobremanera enfatizado, a expensas de los objetos, nunca te será posible el ir por delante de la curva. Usa esos pedestales, nichos y terminales de computadora para mantener vivo el contexto cambiante.

En conclusión, el objetivo, pienso, es el que todo visitante sea tocado por el arte encontrado en el museo; algunos estarán emocionados porque se ven a sí mismos y su historia, y presentes reflejados y glorificados en el arte en los gabinetes de exposición; algunos porque aprenden que existen otras maneras imaginativas de aprehender el universo, pero sobre todo creo que la gente estará emocionada en el museo de arte del futuro cuando se den cuenta que han tenido un encuentro con la autenticidad. Eso quería decir con simplemente una obra auténtica de arte, pero yo creo que ahora significa con una experiencia auténtica también sobre las obras de arte. Y esta experiencia auténtica será una balanceada entre objetos y sobre objetos en

the objects, to special problems attendant to the objects without
making any special exhibition. The objects could be shown
in their own right but they could learn that the museum's
context and mission. I believe that the museum should
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un contexto debe implicar una experiencia más compleja y plena de lo que les hemos permitido a los visitantes en el pasado. Al mismo tiempo se le debe también permitir a la visita una interacción privada con las exposiciones. Debemos permitir que todas nuestras visitas se sientan más como gente del «interior», tal como nunca lo han sentido; necesitan tener lugar adjunto donde puedan leer, jugar, charlar, trabajar en computadoras, en otras palabras, comprometerse con esa libre o informal elección de aprendizaje sobre el arte y la cultura material que los museos son mejores al trabajar que lo que son las escuelas de enseñanza.

El museo sobrevivirá como una empresa (de emprender) cultural pero sólo si la autoridad y certeza de actitud sobre la naturaleza de la cultura y le permiten a los visitantes el descubrimiento y el disfrute personal ahí en las galerías.

De cualquier manera, estaré observando lo que hacen muy de cerca porque será de ustedes que gane yo en autoridad en la universidad y así ayude a educar a historiadores de arte y profesionales del museo; recordar dar, por lo menos, peso PAREJO al objeto en la medida que se estudia historia del arte y se absorben las teorías. Ahora, la teoría va ganando. Me gustaría que el balance se moviera un poco y, recuerden: el puente debe moverse en ambas direcciones con más calma de lo que lo ha hecho en años recientes. Busco en ustedes una guía e inspiración mientras forjan maneras nuevas de montar, interpretar sus colecciones permanentes en sus expandidos y sin duda maravillosos espacios.

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historian educated at Oxford in England visiting the city, an average Anglo viewer with no special interest in the art, and an educated Mexican from the capital will all respond to different interpretations of Mexican Pre-Columbian art differently—and in no case will all of them can be satisfied. I guess what I mean to say is that there is no end to the means available to us for reaching out to our extended communities by means of our art museum, and no end to the politically appropriate ways of doing so. We must work with the objects as we see fit, but we must also be open to our own agendas and welcome those of others by means of content books or computer stations where the public can register their own perspectives. We need to think about slipping electric panels, for instance, to diffuse the sense of high authority with which they are written.

Furthermore, I am convinced that any museum's integrity, especially an encyclopedic museum, will be lodged in its ability to argue visually that its ever expanding shelves will encompass the best works from all civilizations. The museum must not be afraid to argue for quality. And remember, content is not the thing. Content is about the thing. The content will change as quickly as you produce it. Thus, if content is overly emphasized, to the expense of the objects, you will never be able to proceed of the curve. Use those pods and niches and computer terminals for keeping the changing content alive.

In conclusion, the goal, I think, is for every visitor to be touched by the art encountered at the museum. Some will be thrilled because they see themselves and their history and present mirrored and glorified in the art in the display cases; some because they learn that there are other imaginative ways of apprehending the universe. But mostly I believe that people will be thrilled in the art museum of the future when they realize that they have had an encounter with authenticity. That used to mean with steady on authentic work of art, but I believe it now means with an authentic appearance about works of art as well. And this authentic experience will be a balanced one about objects and about objects in context. It must involve a fuller more complex experience than we have allowed our visitors in the past. At the same time it must also allow the visitor a private connection with the exhibits. We have to allow all of our visitors to feel more like insiders than they ever have before. They need to have places nearby where they can read, study, talk about, work on computers, in other words engage in the informal

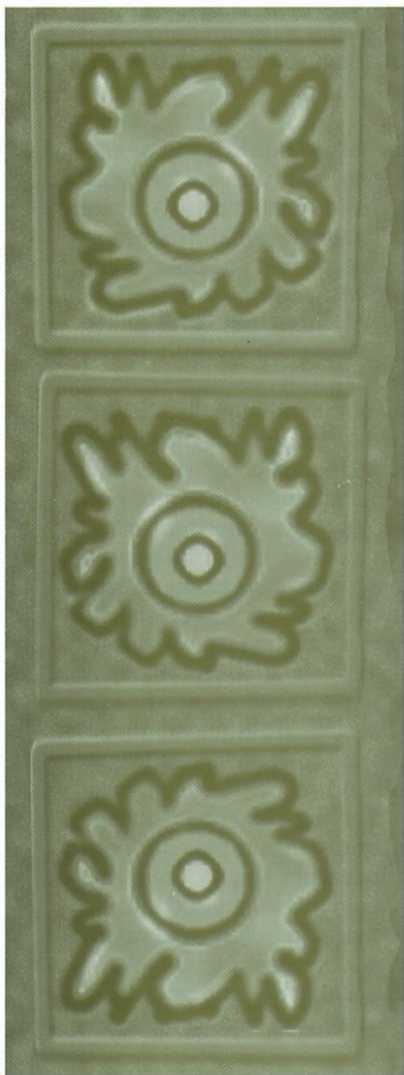
or free-choice learning about the art and the material culture which museums are better at than teaching schools are. The museum will survive as a cultural enterprise, but only if authority and certainty about the nature of culture are allowed to give way to delight and personal discovery right in the galleries themselves by the visitors.

At any rate, I will be watching what you do very closely. Because from you I will gain the authority in the university to help educate art historians and future museum professionals—to remember to give at least equal weight to the object as they study art history and object theory. Right now theory is winning. I would like to see the balance shift a little. And, remember, the bridge must go in both directions with more ease than it has in recent years. I look to you for guidance and inspiration as you forge new ways to display and interpret your permanent collections in your expanded and no doubt gorgeous spaces."

APRIL 16, 2001.

Selma Holo

Professor, Art History and Museum Studies
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University of Southern California
Los Angeles




"LETTER from the West Coast"

This is a version of an address I delivered to a group of curators and educators in a major museum in the Western United States. They were brought together to contemplate new display strategies for their expanding museum. The lecture reflects current concerns and attitudinal shifts common now throughout the country, but perhaps strongest in the west where tradition is less sacred and change less feared:

"Many museums in the United States have been faced with unprecedented opportunities to reinvent themselves. These opportunities are, especially in museums with any degree of public funding, premised upon the need to activate better access for the ever more diverse publics our museums are required to serve. Museums in the west, including those from San Diego to Arizona, and Los Angeles to Seattle have, in recent years reimagined their missions to be ever more inclusive of their diverse publics. They have accomplished this often by initiating a building or

remodeling plan with expanded spaces for educational events and simultaneously by welcoming a wider range of responsibilities, a range that expands upon their traditional charge to collect, preserve and exhibit works of art and material culture. Reconsidered roles for museums include the use of multiple strategies of interpretation, an attitude to public access that encourages considerable interactivity, and most surprisingly, an acceptance that museums must be not only educational, but also on some level, entertaining. Your museum is thinking about the changing nature of the museum before you actually build your new quarters, and for this I commend you.



When I was invited to speak to you today I had to do some soul searching in order to come up with a satisfying answer for myself about how I might be useful to you as you contemplate your role in society. Yes, I have written a book about the role of museums in promoting a more democratic society and I do believe that role to be especially vital at a time when critical thinking in the public sphere is increasingly threatened by inferior education in our public schools. And when minimal training in the analysis and evaluation of the visual culture which besieges us on all sides is the norm. Since museums are the loci of the manifestation of the best of visual thought and feeling, a museum such as yours has a tremendous obligation to be a site where visual ideas about visual culture can not only proliferate but can also inspire that much needed critical thinking. What is amazing about a museum is that the general public is invited to the "show" along with intellectuals, artists, and art world bureaucrats. And, what is further remarkable about this invitation to the public is that it begins with asking them to use their eyes to evaluate not texts but works of material culture. Thus, to answer my own question I represent a bridge. With one foot in the academy and the other in the museum itself, I can speak to you from both worlds, and I can understand your goals, the challenges ahead of you and your aspirations. I can also sympathize with the obstacles. The work that I do relates to most of you in that my job is the education of museum professionals, many of whom work with you at this institution. And so, I bring my experience to you from the academy, even as I am poised to learn from you as you attempt to re-invent the museum to honor old values and to welcome newer ones. I am thus, also prepared to rethink the education of the "new" museum professional, one who can more effectively serve the evolving values of our more complex environment.

The first thought I wish to communicate to you comes in the form of a warning. I know that the work of the university and all of its theoreticians weighs heavily on you as you proceed in rethinking the installations of your permanent collections. But the warning I bring is, curiously, a red flag about the academy itself. Do not be seduced by them. They do not love you, nor do they love what you represent. They have set up a battle and they want their ideas to win. Moreover, they do not care about the public, and the material object is not of the greatest value to them. All rhetoric aside, I promise you this is true. I worry that our museums in the United States are too afraid of admitting and claiming their differences from the university and that they feel increasingly obliged to accommodate the most recent fashions in intellectual thought to don the mini skirts of the mind, as it were. It is one thing to learn from the world of thought that the university represents, and another to be subsumed by it.

Museums must remember that they possess the objects. They must therefore protect, develop, and promote a unique mode of expression because what they represent will outlast the "theory of the day" by centuries. Whether the objects in your care are objects collected from the past or from our own time, they have a potency that we always want to support. And we need to do that by stimulating the sensorial and intellectual capacities in the non specialist viewer (because the specialist probably doesn't need our help or our seduction). We have an enormous power to shape knowledge (as Eileen Hooper-Greenhill

has written about so eloquently in *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*) and we must exercise that ability wisely, self-confidently and well. We must exercise it in a way that honors the works of art we represent. This does not mean ignoring brilliant theories as they transfer from the academy, but rather means that museums must retain the awareness that the theories they consider must pass the tests of the "real stuff!" Museum exhibitions, especially of the permanent collections must not fall into the trap of being mere illustrations of academic trends. If your latest exhibition would be better as a book, produce it as such!

Nor do permanent collection exhibitions have to be like temporary exhibitions; temporary exhibitions have their own theatrical imperative and I say, let the temporary exhibitions roar ahead. They have another role, part of which is to help support financially the less flamboyant permanent collection installations and the less popular but equally significant focus exhibitions that come out of the permanent collections. Rather, I believe it is incumbent upon the newly conceived permanent exhibition strategy to more openly reveal to its publics where the ideas for any particular display





come from and where its political, social or artistic agendas lie. This would constitute a democratizing of the museum and, by extension, a contribution to the education of a more responsible democratic citizenry. It would be a means of constituting and promoting critical thinking as it relates to the world of art, to the world of the imagination, to the nature of creativity, and to the richness and viability our city's cultural life. Thus, I would challenge the call for an aggrandizement of the authority of the museum prompted by an article in a recent issue of the New York Times Magazine. The author of that article, horrified that there might be some misattributions in the Getty drawings department, felt that the museum ought to have immediately taken the works off view in order to maintain public faith in the museum. I, on the other hand, do not believe that museums have to be all-knowing. Rather I believe they need to admit to occasional doubt when, let's say, the authenticity of certain objects is questioned. Indeed, they can turn that doubt into an educational experience for the visitor by raising the questions, by demonstrating the evidence that the museum has to wrestle with. I am therefore asking museums to enter into dialogue with their audiences instead of always lecturing to them. I am calling for more transparency in our museums. The public would only become more interested in us, would belong to us more, if we would let them know what is really going on from time to time.

You see, we in the world of art history and museums are supreme "insiders." We get to know all the stories and all the scandals: the questions about attribution; the problems of iconography; the nervousness about pro-

venance; the truths about artistic influences; and the reason for laws made and broken with respect to cultural properties. But, we never want to share any of those stories with our visitors, especially if they are touchy ones. Why? Because we don't trust the public; we believe that the very public to whom we are responsible needs to be patronized and condescended to. I think the museum of the future has to permit ways of letting people in rather than insisting on the old exclusive authority. We must engage in conversation with the public. If we don't, we will become merely spectacle; we will fulfill our duty and no more. We will not become a vital part of our visitors lives. Authoritarian stances will be our undoing as the workings of the art world continue to become more transparent.

Please note that I am not arguing for a jangle of multiple perspectives in any single display. I am not arguing for telling every story of every curatorial agenda. That would only create chaos. But, I believe this selective "opening up" can be done with the creation of ancillary spaces, with pods and niches adjacent to or near the traditional beautiful displays of the objets. The special spaces could incorporate technology enabling the visitor who was so inclined to become privy to to alternate perspectives, to alternative museological choices about the objets, to special problems attendant to the objects without confounding any particular exhibition. The visitors could then become insiders too in that they could learn that the museum's curatorial and educational team are always making choices about what is most interesting or most important with respect to any object or group of objects. And, the visitors could learn that there are still other ways to

think about these objects and that they, themselves, might have ideas to that effect. These pods or niches could be flexible and transformable as new ideas creep into the art historical discourse. Nevertheless, what they contain should never be allowed to, I believe, overwhelm the objects themselves. Such special spaces would spare the curators from having to muddy up their displays with too many perspectives or to much contextual material. The goal would be to enrich the experience of the visitors, not confuse it.

Another of the things that we need to think about today are alternative ways of presenting the permanent collections in the light of the social context of our region and of our extended cultures. Great care here is in order precisely because social context is changing constantly and radically. Therefore, although one wants to honor social context, the infinite number of approaches to such contexts can be contradictory and, in the end unenlightening. Increasingly, the plethora of possible contexts can be problematic. For example, when dealing with pre-Columbian art from México in a United

States collection, one could choose to present the art in a number of ways. It might be highly contextualized within the nationalistic social model that Mexico has long promoted. Or, it could be read as a part of a larger artistic contribution, an integral part of the universal theatre of the imagination as it is in the British Museum; or it could be displayed as Rufino Tamayo chose to in Oaxaca as a pure and singular aesthetic enterprise, a methodology bent on proving that Pre-Columbian art can hold its place without the necessity of ethnology explaining or supporting it. It could also be conceived as needing to be shown in some or all of these various combinations. But, the context adopted does need to be revealed as the choices that they are. Remember the public is still surprised to learn that there is no such thing as a neutral exhibition. We in the museum world think it is old hat to point that out, but the general public is fascinated by the idea. It is important to remember that you cannot please all of the people all of the time! A Zapotec Indian living in Los Angeles, an art historian educated at Oxford in England visiting the city, an average anglo viewer with no



special interest in the art, and an educated Mexican from the capital will all respond to different interpretations of Mexican Pre-Columbian art - differently - and in no case will all of them can be satisfied. I guess what I mean to say is that there is no end to the means available to us for reaching out to our extended communities by means of our art museums, and no end to the politically appropriate ways of doing so. We must work with the objects as we see fit, but we must admit to our own agendas and welcome those of others by means of comment books or computer stations where the public can register their own perspectives. We need to think about signing didactic panels, for instance, to diffuse the sense of high authority with which they are written.

Furthermore, I am convinced that any museum's integrity, especially an encyclopedic museums, will be lodged in its ability to argue visually that an ever expanding umbrella will encompass the best works from all civilizations. The museum must not be afraid to argue for quality. And remember, context is not the thing. Context is ABOUT the thing. The context will change as quickly as you proclaim it. Thus, if context is overly emphasized, to the expense of the objects, you will never be able to be ahead of the curve. Use those pods and niches and computer terminals for keeping the changing context alive.

In conclusion, the goal, I think, is for every visitor to be touched by the art encountered at the museum. Some will be thrilled because they see themselves and their history and present mirrored and glorified in the art in the display cases; some because they learn that there are other imaginative ways of appre-

hending the universe. But mostly I believe that people will be thrilled in the art museum of the future when they realize that they have had an encounter with simply an authentic work of art, but I believe it now means with an authentic experience about works of art as well. And this authentic experience will be a balanced one about objects in context. It must involve a fuller more complex experience than we have allowed our visitors in the past. At the same time it must also allow the visitor a private interaction with the exhibits. We have to allow all of our visitors to feel more like insiders than they ever have before.

They need to have places nearby where they can read, play, talk about, work on computers, in other words engage in that informal or freechoice learning about the art and the material culture which museums are better at than teaching schools are. The museum will survive as a cultural enterprise, but only if authority and certainty about the nature of culture are allowed to give way to delight and personal discovery right in the galleries themselves by the visitors.

At any rate, I will be watching what you do very closely. Because from you I will gain the authority in the university to help educate art historians and future museum professionals to remember to give at least EQUAL weight to the object as they study art history and absorb theory. Right now theory is winning. I would like to see the balance shift a little. And, remember, the bridge must go in both directions more ease than it has in recent years. I look to you for guidance and inspiration as you forge new ways to display and interpret your permanent collections in your expanded and no doubt gorgeous spaces."