

MESC Newsletter

A Quarterly Publication of

Museum Educators of Southern California

March, 1990

MESCalendar

Upcoming Items of Interest

March 31: CAM Workshop--Building the Effectiveness of the Museum Trustee, Fresno

April 4-9: National Art Education Assn. Conference, Kansas City

April 6: NAEA Events--Museum Education Division Luncheon

April 9: CAM Workshop--Label Libel: Pros and Cons of Exhibit Interpretation, Los Angeles, Municipal Art Gallery

April 9-13: LAUSD and Santa Monica-Malibu School Districts Spring Break

April 22: Earth Day

May 9-13: American Assn. of Museums Annual Meeting, Chicago

May 10: AAM Events--History Museum Educators' Breakfast; Educators and Evaluators Luncheon; Education Marketplace; AAM Education Committee Reception

May 11: AAM Events--Education Committee Business Meeting

May 12: AAM Events--Art Museum Educators' Breakfast

May 18: International Museums Day

July 19-20: California Assn. of Museums Meeting, Monterey

September 5-8: American Assn. for State and Local History Meeting, Washington, DC

October 24-27: Western Museums Conference, San Jose

From the Board

President's Column

by Betsy Quick

It seems impossible that March is already upon us and the MESC is presenting its third program of the 1989-90 year. With past sessions focusing on fundraising and issues of controversy in exhibitions and the upcoming meetings examining museum-school partnerships and volunteer program management, the Executive Board is hopeful that it is serving the wide interests of the MESC membership.

The development of these programs, however, is just one of the responsibilities of the MESC officers and committees. Regular monthly meetings of the Board ensure that the goals of the Long Range Plan are considered in all MESC programs and projects and that committees are working toward the completion of tasks assigned to them. The Development and Program Committees have been directly involved in this year's program planning and in identifying grant possibilities for future MESC projects; the Publication Committee is working on a comprehensive MESC directory of members and services; and the Membership Committee has initiated an ambitious drive to recruit new members. The Public Information Committee continues to

distribute Museum Audiences Today nationwide and is endeavoring to better publicize MESC events within both the museum and the general community. Finally, the Newsletter Committee has published three issues and is working towards a refinement of the newsletter format and to the compilation of groups of articles around thematic concerns.

In April, the Executive Board has been invited by the Palm Springs Desert Museum to have a Planning and Evaluation retreat in the desert. Over that weekend, we hope to evaluate carefully our mid-year progress with the Long Rang Plan and to develop further three additional MESC projects: the Seminar Committee's Summer Seminar on Excellence in Gallery Teaching, a MESC salary survey, and the possible extension of affiliations with other regional museum education groups. The MESC salary survey has been requested by numerous institutional and individual members and will examine the academic requirements, responsibilities, and standards of compensation for a range of museum education and other similar public sector positions in Southern California and selected urban areas. It is our hope that this survey will be useful in assessing more clearly the museum educator's role in the institution and improving the salary status of educators in museums. If you wish to assist with any of these projects, please contact me at (213) 825-9341 or Carla Fantozzi at (213) 485-4581. Again, our appreciation to Dr. Janice Lyle at the Palm Springs Desert Museum for her role in facilitating our Planning Retreat. We are tremely grateful to her.

As we hope you'll agree, MESC continues to be one of the strongest and most active professional regional museum organizations in the nation. With a growing membership, an ever-increasing program attendance, far-reaching institutional sponsorship, and the dedication of so many individual members, MESC will maintain its respected

position in the profession. We look forward to ongoing and exciting new ventures for the organization and its members. Please continue to lend your support and spirit to our success.

Betsy Quick is Education Coordinator at UCLA's Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Last Time at MESC

MESC Tackles Topic of Controversial Exhibitions

by Jenny Mayfield

MESC's October 13th meeting, entitled "Mounting Controversy," came at a particularly apropos time for the museum education community in view of recent decisions in Washington which limited federal support of controversial art exhibitions. At this meeting, Janet Kamien, Master Exhibit Developer at the Field Museum of Natural History; Don Cosentino, Guest Curator for "The Sacred Arts of Vodoun" exhibition at UCLA's Museum of Cultural History; and Sherri Geldin, Associate Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art discussed controversial exhibitions with which they have been involved. Each panelist gave a short introduction to his or her exhibition and described the possible value conflicts that their institutions--stake-holders in these exhibitions--had to face. This discussion was followed by a viewing of the exhibition "Forced Out: The Agony of the Refugee in Our Time" at the Municipal Art Gallery, where the panel discussion was held. Meeting participants then

regrouped to share their insights on the day's events.

Janet Kamien from the Field Museum in Chicago discussed her experience with "Death and Loss," an exhibition she helped design at the Children's Museum in Boston. "Death and Loss" was considered a controversial exhibition because death is a sensitive issue, and often children are taught not to discuss unpleasant subjects like illness and death.

Ms. Kamien said that there are four controversies which can arise when such an exhibition is organized. The exhibition can be purposely provocative, such as the burning of the American flag; the public can disagree about whether the information is true; the public can agree the information is true, but disagree in the interpretation; and lastly, the public can agree, but not know how and with whom to share the information. At different stages in its conceptualization and implementation, "Death and Loss" fell into all four categories.

When "Death and Loss" was first proposed, the National Endowment for the Humanities denied funding because the subject dealt with death. As a result, the organizers were required to reconsider how to present the information in a less confrontational manner. At the same time, they recognized the danger that compromise in an exhibition can reduce the poignancy of its subject. In the end, the exhibition was presented as originally planned.

Doubts the public had about the exhibition were allayed after the exhibition opened. Likewise, criticisms that the exhibition was inappropriate were put to rest. Some religious leaders, however, questioned whether or not the information presented was true, preferring that the museum present a single version of the afterlife which confirmed their beliefs. In contrast, the museum felt it was its mission to share a variety of viewpoints with the public in

spite of the fact that such an approach could provoke controversy. Ms. Kamien concluded by encouraging educators and exhibit designers to take on issues we feel strongly about. Museums are in an ideal position to interpret things and should take risks without feeling guilty about the possibility of failure.

Don Cosentino is a scholar of African and Caribbean belief and is serving as a guest curator at UCLA for the upcoming exhibition, "The Sacred Arts of Vodoun" which includes sacred objects used in worship in this religion. Mr. Cosentino said that his biggest challenge is in trying to present the reality of the religion, as it exists in Haiti, to an American audience that may hold preconceptions.

As an introduction, he explained a little about the religion in order for us to identify with the problem he faced. Vodoun is a combination of Catholicism and African belief that grew up in the West Indies. Africans there were exposed to Catholic missionaries and identified with the iconography of the Catholic faith. For example, women--powerful figures in African religion--could be readily identified with the Virgin Mary. In other words, Vodoun is Africa meeting the new world. Cosentino showed slides of the material culture of Vodoun that he hoped to include in the show.

The goal of the exhibition is to present these objects of the Vodoun religion in a comprehensive yet comprehensible manner through deconstruction of these West Indian art forms and their reintegration in Los Angeles through the construction of a temple. How can one transfer the sacred quality of these objects to outsiders? How does one make the mundane sacred? Mr. Cosentino said that he did not want an easy show about a difficult subject. This will not be an exhibition to which people come as an afternoon pastime, he remarked. The objects must be regarded as spiritually amazing even far removed from their original

context.

Sherri Geldin is Associate Director at the Museum of Contemporary Art and had an active role in the Temporary Contemporary. She explained that one of the roles of an institution of contemporary art is to encourage artists who take risks--artists whose work, therefore, may be controversial. The genesis of the Temporary Contemporary itself was controversial. This museum in Little Tokyo is housed in a warehouse, a facility which reflects aspects of the way in which much contemporary art is made and exhibited. In addition, the museum had to convince Little Tokyo and MOCA's board that it would make a contribution to the community.

In the controversial situation Ms. Geldin discussed, thirty artists participated in an exhibition last May which addressed consumer issues of the 1980s and how these issues influence the making of art. Barbara Kruger--known for her montage aesthetic, including texts and photographs with political content--was one of the artists included. Her work shows a concern with universal issues and more specifically with democratic society, its fragility, the notion of power, and how it is accumulated.

Kruger proposed a mural for the exterior wall of the museum which used the colors and basic form of the American flag, but in place of the stripes she included, in big block letters, the Pledge of Allegiance; and in place of the stars she included the MOCA name and logo. Surrounding the composition were thought-provoking questions such as "Who laughs last?" and "Who prays loudest?" When this proposal was presented to the citizens of Little Tokyo it met with much community concern. Many Japanese-Americans had been forced into internment camps during World War II and felt they did not want the grim reminder of that period of their lives in the form of the American flag and Pledge of

Allegiance. In spite of the fact that the mural was intended to criticize the very attitudes that led to the internment actions, Barbara Kruger's politically charged mural had missed its target.

The artist travelled from New York to Los Angeles to discuss her mural proposal with the community. As a consequence she revised her proposed mural by diminishing the prominence of the Pledge of Allegiance and enlarging the critical questions in an attempt to understand and respond to the community's concerns. By doing so, she created a work that was acceptable to the community that had to live with it. Nonetheless, other objections were raised. Apparently some felt the mural was so aesthetically brash that it was like having a topless bar in the community. Secondly, others defending the importance of free expression felt that the artist was unfairly bullied into changing her piece. (The real political message was obviously lost on this group.) According to Ms. Geldin, the museum's role in such a case is to support the artist in whatever manner possible. As Tolstoy wrote, decisions of silencing are made in the name of public tranquility.

After the presentations, panel members took questions from the audience. Questions were raised as to the role the museum plays in this issue. Don Cosentino was asked, "Do we have to be nice to bigots?" He responded by saying that we did not have to be nice to the bigots, but we did have to be nice to the subject. "We want people to appreciate the subject, but not at the expense of making things comfortable." Janet Kamien responded by saying we should be nice to bigots, a sentiment echoed by some in the audience who said the bigots need educating too. Kamien said she tried to answer hate mail diplomatically, while not diluting the material. There is a need to be there to help and soothe, she said. For example, at the Boston exhibition signs

were posted which offered names of individuals and organizations to whom visitors could turn if they felt they needed help dealing with the issue of death. In addition, there was a place for the public to write down how they felt about what they had seen.

Sherri Geldin was asked how a museum can prepare for negative responses to the art. She explained that in a contemporary museum most criticism is brought on by lack of understanding of the art, in which the public responds by saying, "This is crap. My kids could do it." She suggested that educators need to present the case of contemporary art, addressing the broad issues that underlie it, and not just specific collections.

The pervading question throughout the meeting was: where should a museum draw the line with regards to its political involvement? Panelists and discussants alike seemed to agree that this is a decision each institution must make independently on the basis of its stated mission.

Jenny Mayfield is an Intern in the Department of Education and Academic Affairs at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Program Provides Fundraising Tips

by Wade Richards

At MESC's December 8th program, "Get a Piece of the Pie or Just Go for the Dough," museum educators, joined at the Huntington Library by their colleagues in development, heard from experts on how to seek funding for their programs both from charitable foundations and from individuals. This is an issue of particular interest these days since, as facilitator Lee Draper pointed out, in the last few years not only has the amount of public funds available decreased, but so has

the value of what those dollars can buy. These are among a variety of factors contributing to a disturbing trend in the financial underpinnings of the nation's museums, with those in Southern California no exception.

To remedy this shortfall, the morning's panelists outlined what is available from their respective organizations. In addition to Lee Draper from the California Community Foundation, we heard from Arnie Berkhoff of Pacific Enterprises, and Lucretia Cloran of the ARCO Foundation. Draper explained that the CCF is a community foundation, meaning that its assets come from the gifts of many people, in amounts from a few thousand dollars to millions. It uses the income from these funds to award grants in the areas of health, human services, the arts, and education. Granting priorities at the CCF are to give where the need is greatest, rather than to augment the funds of already established programs serving advantaged populations. Grants are considered as they are received year-round and the strongest proposals are those which involve community-based organizations and support diversity, including, but not limited to, ethnic diversity.

Pacific Enterprises is one example of a corporate foundation which, through its grants, supports the arts and private higher education. Its subsidiaries--Southern California Gas Company, Thrifty, and Big 5 Sporting Goods--also have giving programs, although these are directed more towards community-based organizations. Arnie Berkhoff explained that corporations give for a variety of reasons, including the desire to build corporate name, increase consumer use of products or services, and improve the community for company employees. Whatever the case, Berkhoff stressed that it is important for grant seekers to know a company's motivation and tie requests for funds to the reason that particular company awards grants. For example, some companies

give for reasons of true philanthropy and these are the firms who are most likely to provide general operating support. Those who are trying to increase sales will more likely want a special exhibition or something more visible with which to be associated. In short, his message was, know your foundation--look at what they have funded in the past and follow their funding guidelines.

Lucretia Cloran added to Mr. Berkhoff's remarks, placing special emphasis on the need for grant applications to be short and clear. A well-written cover letter, which describes the program in the first few paragraphs, is crucial for your proposal to receive proper attention; so is addressing it to the proper officer at the granting foundation--more than anything, it shows genuine interest and work on your part. Like Mr. Berkhoff, Ms. Cloran spoke about the need to know the character of the foundation to which you are applying, in addition to its guidelines. ARCO, for example, has not in the past funded arts events on university campuses, but might in the future fund projects which involve the university with the outside community. ARCO also prefers programs which offer repeat or ongoing experiences to their target audience.

During the discussion session that followed, many questions aimed to find out how funding organizations regard certain types of proposals. Among the queries were, "How do funding organizations regard controversial exhibitions?" and "What constitutes meaningful 'diversity' and 'community involvement' as opposed to tokenism?" Other questions sought information about the mechanics of grant writing: "What is your turn-around time?" and "What percentage of proposals do you accept?"

After a pleasant lunch in the Huntington garden, we heard from Susan Scribner, who changed the focus slightly and concentrated on raising money from individuals.

Among the key points in her lively opening remarks: learn to say the words "dollars" and "checks" without having a heart attack; don't chase money, but depend on the quality of your vision to raise funds for your organization; and clarify your objectives and publicize them so that likely funders can find you.

Later, Ms. Scribner outlined some characteristics of successful fundraising. First, avoid crisis fundraising--"we'll go under if you don't give us money" turns off potential donors because people want to give to something that is already successful. Diversifying your funding sources, addressing the unique concerns of each "donor audience," publicizing unique events, and building ongoing relationships with your donors are also important. Lastly, cooperative projects make people feel that they are getting a bigger bang for their buck, and a sense of community ownership in your organization builds motivation for giving.

For the final part of her presentation, Ms. Scribner discussed how to make a strong request for funds. Among all the reasons that people contribute, the greatest reason is because they are asked--especially because they are asked in the right way and by the right people, she said. Volunteers make good fundraisers because their not-for-pay involvement in the organization is a demonstration of their belief in the work the institution accomplishes. Often a team of volunteer and staff member is successful because it adds a person with command of facts about the institution's programs and knowledge of its mission. In addition, team members can support each other in the face of possible rejection.

While all of the information MESC members heard at the meeting was valuable, one of the most rewarding aspects of the day was the interaction that took place between educators and individuals in other areas of museum practice. Our thanks to David Fears,

who organized the program, and to our hosts at the Huntington Library for such a useful and broadening experience.

Wade Richards is a Museum Educator at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Focus On

In this column, the MESC Newsletter highlights the programs and other activities of various member institutions. This issue we are happy to feature two new museums and welcome them to the community of educators in Southern California.

Construction Underway on Museum of Tolerance

contributed by Francine Lis

Tolerance. In its most profound sense, it relates to the way people of different backgrounds coexist and understand one another. A unique concept in museums, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's new Beit Hashoah/Museum of Tolerance presents an in-depth examination of the subject and illustrates the evils and far-reaching consequences of intolerance.

The new museum is mid-way through construction at its site on Pico Boulevard in West Los Angeles. Scheduled for completion in Spring 1991, the 165,000-square-foot facility is being built on a site adjacent to the existing Simon Wiesenthal Center. Established in 1977, the Center is dedicated to the study of the Holocaust, its contemporary implications, and related human rights issues.

In keeping with that mission, the experiential museum explores the history of the

Holocaust and the history of racism and prejudice, incorporating within the complex a state-of-the-art computer learning center. The Museum uses technologically advanced exhibits, databanks, archives, and interactive video displays to help visitors understand the nature and consequences of bigotry and racial hatred. Although the Museum focuses only on prejudice based on religion, race, or ethnicity, it hopes by addressing these issues to raise visitor awareness of all kinds of bigotry.

Dr. Gerald Margolis, director of the Wiesenthal Center and the new museum, describes of the Museum of Tolerance in terms of recent "hate crimes" in the United States: "Howard Beach, the 'wilding' in Central Park, and Bensonhurst have now entered our language as referents to violence and urban aggression," he noted. Margolis added, "As we enter the 90s the hard won victories of the 60s and the lessons of tolerance seem to have evaporated."

The museum and exhibits were designed by a team headed by Karl Katz, who developed the original concept for the Beit Hashoah/Museum of Tolerance. In addition to archives, the complex will comprise four main elements:

The *American experience* exhibit area will focus on human behavior and prejudice in America. It will combine interactive exhibits, integrated graphic displays, and specially produced short films which will be shown in eight separate theaters. Throughout this section, each visitor will learn his or her own personal stake in the issue of tolerance.

The *Holocaust section* is conceived as a walk back in time, exposing visitors to the tragedy that was Nazi Germany. They will experience the sights and sounds of 1930s Berlin and end up at a replica of the gates of Auschwitz. Featuring thirty major exhibits, this section will incorporate innovative presentation techniques that will communicate

how the Holocaust was perpetrated. These exhibits will help visitors understand that where there is intolerance, the potential exists for an atrocity of this magnitude to happen again.

In the *Global Situation Room*, human rights issues will be actively reported and assessed. This section of the museum will contain monitoring equipment with up-to-the-minute printout capabilities of the Associated Press and other news agencies. This section will enable visitors to place their museum experience in context with breaking human rights stories, underscoring the relevance of remembrance and tolerance.

Meeting the needs of novices and scholars alike, the *Multi-Media Learning Center* will feature an interactive computer system that will access tens of thousands of photographs, documents, maps, animated displays, audio segments, video testimony from Holocaust survivors, and information from the Macmillan Encyclopedia of the Holocaust. "We are especially excited about this center because it utilizes the cutting edge of technology, but also because the technology of the 90s will permit each visitor direct access to the people, the lessons, the hope and the tragedy of the Holocaust," said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean and project manager of the Learning Center.

The *Museum Archives* will contain more than 1,200 historical records, photographs, pieces of correspondence, diaries, and artifacts. Among the collections are original letters by Anne Frank and a special memorial to the children who perished in the Holocaust. Complementing these new facilities will be educational services, including a docent program and a school visit program.

Francine Lis is Educational Outreach Associate at the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Pasadena's Armory Center Celebrates the Creative Spirit

contributed by Sue Maberry

After months of planning and construction, Pasadena's new Armory Center for the Arts opened last November with the goal of providing the public with the opportunity to experience and learn from a variety of art forms in a setting that encourages creative expression, perception, and growth. Serving local needs is an especially important focus for the organization in its new facility. Said Director Peter Sellars at the dedication of the Center, "The one thing I should emphasize about the Armory is the sense of ownership by the community. What is important in art is what is local, what is specific, and what means something to the people who are creating it."

The Armory Center for the Arts provides opportunities for the entire community to experience and participate in the arts—in classes, workshops, and exhibitions and performances at the Armory; in outreach programs throughout Pasadena and Altadena; and in area schools, museums, and senior centers. The Armory's programs offer both in-depth and introductory arts experiences to a wide and diverse audience, particularly to people with limited access to the arts. Some of these programs include:

Studio Art Program. Children and adults work with professional artists to develop their creative abilities through innovative explorations of materials and ideas. Classes include drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, filmmaking, mime, and dance. Scholarships extend the experience to all children who wish to participate regardless of disability or financial need.

Gallery Program. Emerging and established arts organizations from Southern California collaborate with the Armory Cen-

ter for the Arts in the development of exhibitions and performances in the Armory's new gallery space. Already, a wide range of artists and organizations in the Los Angeles area have participated in the program, which is designed to bring their ideas and visions to a wider audience. Opening April 8 and continuing through May 13 is "Artists and the Environment," a multi-media show that includes a video project about the Los Angeles River created by high school students in the Humanitas Program.

Outreach through Art. Over five thousand children from lower-income families attend free art classes taught by professional artists at neighborhood sites such as parks, libraries, and schools. These after-school sessions help build the children's skills, expand their imaginations, and have a positive effect on their self-esteem. Programs for people with special needs also give the disabled the opportunity to take an active part in the visual and performing arts. During the past few months, the "Walk to Art" program has included classes such as Introduction to Theater, Headdresses, Rattles, and Masks; Clay Inventions and Inventors; and Toys and Puppets. In addition, the Center meets the needs of its multicultural audience by sponsoring a family day which is advertised both in English and Spanish. Upcoming family programs include celebration of Earth Day on April 21 and a walking tour of Old Pasadena on May 12 to mark National History Preservation Week.

Cultural Heritage Program. Students from schools throughout Southern California explore the cultures, lifestyles, and artforms of several non-Western peoples by viewing and discussing objects on loan from area museums. The students then incorporate their ideas and impressions into their own art projects. Several of these programs are presented free of charge at local libraries which provide follow-up reading sessions about the cultures

presented.

Environmental exploration. Students from selected schools explore a local wilderness area, led by both an environmental expert and an artist. The children record their observations of nature and problems in the environment through drawing, painting, design, and creative writing.

The Armory Center for the Arts is home to the educational programs of the former Pasadena Arts Workshops. These programs have been the impetus for the Armory's renovation from the very beginning, guiding the planners, inspiring the architect, and encouraging the generosity of supporters. In turn, the new space is inspiring new and expanded programs that serve more people than ever before.

Sue Maberry is a Program Director in charge of studio activities at the Armory Center for the Arts.

Reminder from the Publications Committee

Each MESC member should have received a data collection form for the upcoming MESC member directory. If you haven't done so already, please make corrections or additions and return it to us. If you are an individual member, verify your address and phone number and add a few words to describe your areas of primary responsibility. Examples might be: school programs, docent training, self-touring guides, gallery talks, etc. If you are an institutional member of MESC, please make sure that your form lists all the educators working at your museum and their contact information. Once again, a few words about individuals' areas of responsibility would be helpful. You may return completed forms to Joan Grasty, Education Department, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.

Current Research

Focus Groups Reveal More about Museum Visitors

compiled by Wade Richards from a project summary from Alan Newman

Recently eleven art museums took part in a research project sponsored by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, designed to identify staff expectations and impressions of public expectations about art museums and to learn more about the experience of visitors and the perceptions of non-visitors that keep them from visiting. Participating institutions were: The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, The Brooklyn Museum, The Chicago Art Institute, The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Dallas Museum of Art, The Denver Art Museum, The J. Paul Getty Museum, The National Gallery of Art, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Seattle Museum of Art, The Toledo Museum of Art.

The project was conducted using focus group methodology. Focus groups are widely used in market and consumer research but represent a relatively new technique for museum visitor studies. The method consists of roundtable discussions among eight to twelve pre-screened participants selected from a targeted population. The group is led by a trained moderator who follows a discussion outline prepared in consultation with the client--in this case, the museum staff. Focus groups are held in special facilities with a conference room for the group discussion and an observation room behind a one-way mirror. Facilities are equipped with audio and videotape recording equipment for record keeping.

As a qualitative research technique,

focus groups serve two important objectives. First, they provide insight into visitor attitudes, perceptions, and behavior. Second, they provide a catalyst for communication among the observers of the group (i.e., the staff behind the one-way mirror). Often times, the interaction among observers is as powerful a product of the research as the findings themselves. This is what attracted the Getty and the museum consortium. By observing the public discuss their educational and experiential insights from a museum visit, it was hypothesized that a fruitful dialogue would ensue among the museum's administrators, educators, and curators and that a clearer understanding of the role of education in art museums would develop. These processes, it was speculated, would promote team building among the professional staff.

Following consultation with museum staff, two pairs of focus groups were conducted with consumers (i.e., visitors). One pair of groups was conducted with visitors to the museum and the other pair was conducted with non-visitors (or, in some cases, people who had not visited since childhood). The components of each pair of consumer focus groups were a preliminary focus group during which expectations about a museum visit were discussed; a visit to the museum with an assignment to see specific galleries identified by the staff in advance (during the visit, participants were asked to keep a diary of their experience); and a follow-up focus group to discuss participants' actual experiences and how they compared to their expectations. Participants for each pair of focus groups were recruited on the telephone by professional interviewers and screened on the basis of pre-selected demographic criteria.

The findings of the research echo many of the results of other visitor studies--including MESCS's Museum Audiences Today and research at the Denver Art Museum, the sub-

ject of a MESCS program last summer--but had a special impact on museum staff because information came in the form of personal comments from individuals, rather than as statistical analysis of an impersonal questionnaire. In the focus groups with non-visitors it was found that there is no single reason that they do not visit the museum. Some cited a feeling of intimidation, including the following perceptions: that they will be unable to understand and appreciate the objects at the museum because they have no prior knowledge of art; that everyone who does visit museums already knows about art before they go; that the museum will not provide them assistance in understanding what they are seeing; that art museums are for the upper class only; that they have to dress up to visit an art museum; and that talking in normal conversational tones is inappropriate in an art museum.

Other non-visitors are unaware of specific objects or exhibits in their city's art museum. They are not sure if there is anything there that would interest them and their attention is drawn to more aggressive competitors for leisure time, such as zoos, science museums, and other attractions. Yet even for those who might have knowledge of and interest in an art museum, location was sometime a disincentive: people felt that the museum was hard to get to or in a part of town in which they felt uncomfortable.

In looking at the experience of visitors (including the non-visitors after their assigned visit), the study found that participants considered their visits educational and beneficial. Respondents valued the understanding of history and of various cultures and eras, and gained an appreciation of the basic similarities and universal concerns across time. The way that art objects arouse intellectual curiosity and inspire fantasies about past eras and foreign cultures was also noted. Other visitors remarked that they were surprised and excited

by the beauty, age, and craftsmanship of some of the collections.

Some of the positive comments had not so much to do with the art, as with the experience of going to the museum. Visitors commented that art museums provide an escape from reality because of their peaceful, relaxed atmosphere. They also said that the environment fosters communication about related and unrelated subjects. It provides an arena for shared experiences as well as self-discovery and introspection.

On the negative side, some visitors said they found the museum too small or the collections too limited. Specifically, they were disappointed by the lack of works by famous artists and by the lack of paintings in museums whose collections are largely other kinds of objects. At all eleven institutions visitors commented that there was not enough orientation. They felt that there was inadequate information for them to understand how the museum was arranged and to decide what to see and how to get there. Some commented that important objects and those by famous artists need to be highlighted in some way so that they will not be missed.

Visitors appreciated it when information was provided with objects in the form of labels and brochures--they said it increased their "connection" to the work of art, while lack of information was frustrating and detracted from their enjoyment of the museum. Most labels, they remarked, should include more detailed information, including information about the artist's life, the subject of art and its historic and artistic significance, background on the time period and culture, and the method and tools used in the creation of a work of art. Even when they were pleased with the content of labels, visitors commented that often the placement or size of labels made them difficult to use.

Certain kinds of art need more inter-

pretation, visitors said. For art from non-Western cultures, explanations of cultural symbols and beliefs are necessary to define their meaning and significance. In addition, visitors need information explaining why everyday objects from non-Western cultures are considered art and belong in an art museum instead of a natural history museum. Contemporary art is also challenging, though appreciation of it is aided by information describing the artist's intentions and the meanings of the choices the artist has made.

In general, people want information--and in a variety of formats, including brochures, "acoustiguides," docent- or staff-led tours, and audio and video presentations. Whatever format they prefer, many visitors commented that the availability of interpretive materials or services is not adequately publicized. Brochures are hard to locate and it is difficult to get information on tours and other programs. Overcoming these obstacles will be instrumental in convincing some of the participants to become repeat visitors.

The study also surveyed visitor opinions about layout and organization of museums and about the physical surroundings and presentation of collections. These findings, together with those outlined briefly above, were the subject of a meeting last November in Phoenix that brought together directors, educators, and curators from the eleven participating institutions. The proceedings from that meeting, as well as a compilation of video clips from the focus group sessions, is now being edited and ought to be available by the time AAM rolls around in May. These will be added to a growing body of information that helps museum staff better meet visitor needs.

For further reading on visitor studies in an art museum, see Randi Korn, "Introduction to Evaluation: Theory and Methodology" in Nancy Berry and Susan Mayer (eds.), *Museum Education: History, Theory, and Practice* (Reston, VA: NAEA, 1989), pp. 219-238.

In the Community

Professional Development Opportunities

Gil Leaf, Director of the Los Angeles Children's Museum will give presentation entitled "The Importance of Families in Museums" at the J. Paul Getty Museum on Thursday, March 29, from 3:00 to 4:30. Anyone interested in attending may make reservations by calling the Department of Education and Academic Affairs at (213) 459-7611, ext. 300.

Cal State University, Los Angeles, is offering a course of interest to museum educators: "Cultural Kinship Expressed through Visual Forms and Storytelling." The class offers a team-teaching, interdisciplinary approach that discovers the relationships between the oral traditions of story-telling and the language of visual forms as common links of kinship among Asian, African, and North American peoples. Course content is drawn from four areas, including folktales, story-telling, visual art experiences, and museum visits. Dates for the class are April 20, 21, 27, 28, and May 4 and 5. Fees for the class total \$218.00. For further information, inquire regarding course EDEL 490/ART 454L to Dr. Wanna Zinsmaster, School of Education, at (213) 343-4369 or Dr. Geraldine Dimondstein, Art Department, at (213) 939-4962.

Notices of classes and other items of interest to the museum education community are welcome. Please send them to Wade Richards, Newsletter Editor, J. Paul Getty Museum, P.O. Box 2112, Santa Monica, CA, 90406. Or phone it in to (213) 459-7611, ext. 362.

Our Next Meeting

April MESC Program Highlights Volunteer Management

For our final general session before the summer break, MESC members will gather in April to discuss the management of museum volunteers. Unlike the sessions of the Docent League of Southern California or the National Docent Symposium, which tend to concentrate on touring techniques for museum guides, the April session will deal specifically with aspects of volunteer administration, and will present strategies for the educators and other museum staff who are charged with volunteer training and supervision. Our speaker for the day will be Lenore Jacoby, Executive Director of the Volunteer Center of the Greater Pomona Valley. Among Ms. Jacoby's topics will be: recruitment and interviewing, building consensus for institutional goals and objectives, evaluation, and diversification of volunteer corps. There will be time for small-group working sessions and a question-and-answer period. We expect the day to be of great concrete and practical use and hope many MESC members can join us. Additional information will be sent to members as soon as the date and location are selected.

MESClassifieds

Position Available

The J. Paul Getty Museum is seeking a museum educator to teach and prepare educational materials to help young people and families understand and appreciate the Museum and its collections. Other duties include further developing family programs and

coordinating programs for non-traditional audiences; participating as one of a team in department planning and staff training; developing and maintaining expert knowledge and skills in educational theory and practice; modelling interactive teaching strategies and conducting and presenting research; and serving as liaison for the Museum with the community and other educational programs. Candidates for the position should hold a Masters (or doctorate) in museum education, art education, art history, or studio art and have a minimum of three years museum, school, or university teaching, including significant experience teaching young people and families; or equivalent combination of education and experience. Other qualifications include: a professional commitment to art museum education, with expertise in education and general knowledge of the history of art; and excellent teaching, writing, interpersonal, and public speaking skills. Experience with non-traditional audiences and proficiency in Spanish is desirable. Salary commensurate with qualifications. Interested individuals should send a resume, references, and supporting materials to: Director of Personnel, J. Paul Getty Museum, P.O. Box 2112, Santa Monica, CA, 90406. EOE.

Position Available

The Armory Center for the Arts is seeking an Outreach Assistant. Duties include helping Center teachers at outreach sites by taking role, organizing supplies, and assisting with instruction and clean-up. Position available in June. Approx. \$6/hr. Call Doris Goldstein at (818) 792-5101 or write to the Armory Center, 145 N. Raymond, Pasadena, CA, 91101.

Attention Science, History, and Zoo Educators!

Does it ever seem to you like MESC is really mostly about art museums? We on the Board and at the Newsletter would like to change that. Please inform us of your professional meetings for the MESC calendar. And especially consider writing a small article on the important issues in your field. We would like to make a special effort to include items on history and science museums in our April newsletter. To submit an article, please call Wade Richards at (213) 459-7611, ext. 362.

MESC

MUSEUM EDUCATORS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership Categories:

Institutional: Allows a museum to be represented by an open number of attendants at any regular meeting; includes memberships sponsored by institutions and/or their support groups.

Individual:

Valid only for the person in whose name the membership is held.

Annual Dues:

☐	Institution.....	\$35.00	☐	Renewal
☐	Individual.....	\$15.00	☐	New Membership

Name.....
Title.....
Institution.....
Street.....
City.....
Phone.....(.....).....day.....(.....).....evening
Amount enclosed.....\$.....Date.....

Make checks payable to: MESC

Mail to: MESC, c/o Getty Museum, P.O. Box 2112, Santa Monica, CA, 90406

MUSEUM EDUCATORS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
c/o The J. Paul Getty Museum
P.O. Box 2112
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