



Lila Wallace-  
Reader's Digest Fund

# Engaging the Entire Community:

*A New Role for Permanent Collections*

Museum Makeover Extends Beyond the  
Artwork and Installations

**Walker Art Center**

Finding New Friends in Old Places

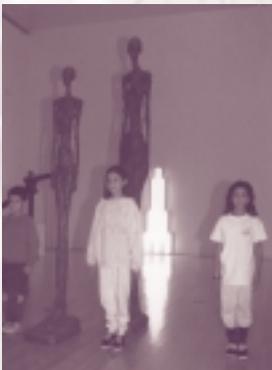
**Museum of Fine Arts, Houston**

Interests of Local Employers and Museum  
Merge in Toledo

**Toledo Museum of Art**

Start with the Children

**The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles**



### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund is to invest in programs that enhance the cultural life of communities and encourage people to make the arts and culture an active part of their everyday lives.

# Engaging the Entire Community:

## *A New Role for Permanent Collections*

### Strategies for Building and Sustaining Audiences

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**Creative partnerships—including ones with schools, businesses and community organizations—are among the strategies museums are using to draw people.**

## Introduction

“How do we make ourselves a more relevant and meaningful presence in people’s lives?” That compelling question is on the minds of many arts and cultural organizations these days. And for a growing number of institutions—including 29 fine arts museums taking part in the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund’s Museum Collections Accessibility Initiative—answers are beginning to emerge. Launched in 1991, the program is helping these museums find ways to attract and serve a diverse mix of visitors through a range of new activities and innovative programs tied to their permanent collections.

As one museum director says, this work starts when museums “climb down from the ivory tower” and begin talking directly to people. Through this process of asking people about their perceptions of the museum, what they like and dislike about it, and what would make them want to become more involved, museums are learning lots of valuable information about themselves, their communities, and how they fit in.

This report, the second in a series, shares experiences of several museums participating in the Fund’s initiative. Articles discuss the strategies museums are using—such as creative partnerships with churches, schools, businesses and community organizations—that are helping to draw in people, many from untapped audiences. Examples range from quilting programs for young mothers that the Walker Art Center is supporting at a local YWCA, to photography projects for high school students sponsored by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where student works are displayed both on gallery walls and at locations throughout the city, to lectures and other workplace activities the Toledo Museum of Art is sponsoring at participating businesses.

Cultural institutions working to build audiences do so for a variety of reasons—and are learning similar lessons. Like their counterparts in theater, dance, music and the literary arts also aiming to broaden and deepen cultural participation, museums see that this work not only benefits their organizations culturally, but it also makes good business sense—as they watch their audiences grow and support from donors increase. And just as important, these changes in the ways museums do business don't require any of them to compromise the quality of the art or the manner in which it is presented.

We hope this report and the stories these museums have to share stimulate new thinking, lively conversation and a continuing commitment among cultural organizations of all sizes and across all fields to take this work to even higher levels.

M. Christine DeVita, President  
Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund  
February 1999



# Walker Art Center

## *Museum Makeover Extends Beyond the Artwork and Installations*

### Lessons Learned:

- **For museums to successfully reach out to new audiences, employees at every level of the institution must be actively involved.**
- **Long-term, ongoing relationships with partner organizations are vital to sustaining participation among new audiences.**
- **Giving young people a voice may help build a lifelong interest in the arts.**

To successfully launch an audience-building initiative, museums need the support and participation of the entire institution—from the director and board of trustees to curatorial, education and marketing staffs, as well as the security force and ticket sellers. The most accomplished initiatives not only involve the entire institution, but fundamentally change the way it operates.

The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis is an exemplary model of this approach. A modern and contemporary art museum that offers programming in the visual arts, performing arts, media arts as well as education and community programs, the Walker expanded its artistic mission in 1993 to better serve more diverse audiences. As a starting place, the museum is rethinking the interpretation of not only its collections, but modernism as well. “Our new criteria for developing programs have become a mantra: Multi-disciplinary, diverse in artists and audiences, and international in focus,” explained Karen Moss, director of education and community programs. “All exhibitions and programs must meet at least one of those criteria.” Through its acquisitions, commissions, presentations, and artist residency activities, the Walker has embraced a variety of art forms—film and video, dance, music, performance art and poetry—to tell the story of 20th century culture and aesthetics. And the museum has tried to represent more points of view by including the art and artists of many cultures.

For *New Directions/New Audiences*, the Walker has effectively used these guiding principles to create exhibitions and programs that reach communities



As part of *The Listening Project*, a Walker Art Center program to reach new audiences, a student performs a dance inspired by a painting by Sigmar Polke from the museum's permanent collection.

of color, low-income families and teens. Certain programs appeal directly to target audiences as well as the Walker's traditional audiences. For example, in 1994, the Walker brought dancer/choreographer Chuck Davis to Minneapolis for an extended residency and to develop a new work. In addition to conducting workshops in the African American community, Davis involved a diverse cast of local performers to present his new work, *Babu's Magic*, in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, which is adjacent to the museum. More than 2,500 people attended.



The work of artist Joseph Beuys, depicted above in this self portrait from the Walker's permanent collection, has influenced a variety of museum activities. One of these is a project that included the planting of more than 1,000 trees—inspired by Beuy's *7,000 Oaks* project in Germany.





The Walker offers opportunities for the community to learn native printmaking through *Indigenous Impressions*.



Print made during Native Arts Circle printmaking workshop

The Walker also presented *Frank Stella at Tyler Graphics*, an exhibition drawn from its permanent collection, which includes the largest holding of prints by artist Frank Stella in the United States. The museum invited a group of local high school students to meet with the exhibition's curator for an inside look at how the show was organized and installed. They then took part in a workshop at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, where they learned the fundamentals of a variety of printmaking techniques used in Stella's work. The museum also invited members of a statewide organization of Indian artists, Native Arts Circle, to tour the show and participate in a printmaking workshop in the Walker's ArtLab led by Native American artist Jean LaMarr.

“Historically, the Native American community has not felt embraced by the Walker,” explained Moss. To overcome this obstacle, the museum has developed an ongoing partnership with Native Arts Circle that includes annual printmaking workshops and collaborative programming for one of the Walker's quarterly *Free First Saturday* festivals. The two organizations also co-sponsor the *Two Rivers Native Film and Video Festival*, which has become an annual event. “We're interested in forming relationships that are ongoing,” Moss said. “We’ve found that after we've been partnering with organizations and communities for a while, awareness, trust and regular participation develop.”

Partnerships are a cornerstone of the Walker's community outreach efforts. Others include:

- Programming with Pillsbury Neighborhood Services and the YWCA, which serve a variety of diverse communities in the Twin Cities. One partner, Pillsbury House, served as a co-presenter and venue for the Walker's presentation of the *Women in the Director's Chair* film series, which featured works from its permanent collection, new films by teenagers and independent films from across the country. For the next series, young mothers in a parenting class at Pillsbury House are currently creating media works about their lives. Working with the YWCA,

Walker staff helped develop *A Stitch of Time*, a quilting and writing program for women of different age and ethnic backgrounds that linked ideas about culture and identity raised in *no place (like home)*, an exhibition of international artists.



*Weaving Tales*, a *Free First Saturday* activity, demonstrates self expression through collage making.

- Collaboration with four different community organizations every year to produce *Free First Saturday* programs for families with young children. The Walker has worked with the Hmong American Partnership to plan and produce a day-long event highlighting Asian art and culture that included tours of the collection, performances, film and video programs and art activities. “We program and market jointly—and whenever possible, produce an event flyer in the language of the community,” Moss said. In 1996-97, the Walker reported that more than 100,000 people attended the museum on *Free First Saturdays*, with research showing that a substantial number of participants were from target audience groups—and first time visitors to the museum.
- Providing transportation, reduced membership fees and discounts. To help those who either can’t get there on their own or afford the price of admission, the Walker provides free bus service to many of its programs, gives away tickets and offers a special membership package. The Explore Membership Program, which is made available to low-income individuals and their families as well as community organizations that serve these populations, waives traditional membership fees and includes gallery admissions and tickets to performing arts events, film and video screenings and selected education programs. Explore members also receive invitations to previews, calendars and special publications, and discounts on book shop purchases. Since its inception in 1994, more than 5,000 free gallery admissions and events tickets have been utilized by Explore members.
- Expanded public and interpretive programs. Regularly scheduled public programs bring a wide range of artists, critics and historians to the museum to discuss the collection and its relation to other disciplines.

**A more cooperative relationship between the museum’s curators and education staff is resulting in compelling new exhibitions and programs.**



The Explore Program offers transportation, reduced membership fees and discounts to low-income individuals and families.

These programs have also encouraged a more cooperative relationship between curators and education staff. Moss, who has a curatorial background, attends curators' meetings to provide feedback on how she thinks the public will receive exhibitions. While the work of the two departments, historically, has been separate, compelling new exhibitions and programs are resulting from the collaboration. For example, in a show of recently acquired works, Moss urged curators to explain in wall labels why they chose particular works. The show, which was called *Composing the Collection*, invited the public to respond. Visitors wrote their own wall labels and voted on their favorite works. A subsequent exhibition of the 20 most popular works featured wall labels written by visitors. “It was a triumph,” said Moss. “The curators and audiences engaged in a dialogue that centered on the collection.”

Thanks to these combined efforts, the Walker's overall annual attendance is up nearly 20 percent since they began. To the museum’s delight, many of the newcomers are teenagers. “Our teen programs are the initiative’s most successful component,” said Moss. “Teens are our most diverse audience; through them we’re reaching all three of our target audiences—youth, people of color, and low-income families.”

In 1996, the Walker established the Teen Arts Council, which helps drive all teen programming at the museum. The self-governing group, which currently includes 12 members ages 14 to 18, has an office at the Walker, a budget line and a staff advisor. Members, who represent a range of ethnic, racial and economic communities, plan and implement teen programs, and help market museum programs to young people.

Now a permanent museum program, the Teen Arts Council has fulfilled its goals of increasing attendance and deepening participation of a broad range of young people at the Walker. Participants' commitment to the Walker is evident at the Teen Program's annual alumni holiday party. According to Moss, alumni return as college students and even graduates, "girding hopes that art, and maybe even the Walker, will continue to hold a place in their lives."



The Walker's Teen Arts Council has successfully attracted young people to the museum.



More than 50 local teenagers participated in *Hot Art Injection (Hold Still)*.



Special publications are targeted specifically to young people.

## Walker Art Center

### An office, a budget, a voice: teens find a home at Walker

The Teen Program has been described as the most effective component of *New Definitions/New Audiences*, the Walker Art Center’s initiative to diversify audiences. “Teens see themselves as having restricted access to a lot of things—and believe that adults don’t listen to them,” said Michelle Coffey, the Teen Program’s assistant manager. “The museum has invited them to bring their voices and experiences into the institution. And we’ve empowered them to develop their own programs.”

The 12-member Teen Arts Council, which meets weekly, serves as an advisory group to the museum on reaching out to teens. But it also has a budget and the authority to create programs. In July 1997, the Council organized *Hot Art Injection (Hold Still)*, an exhibition of 100 multi-media art works by 50 teens from the metro area. Council members were responsible for all aspects of the show—selecting the works from more than 700 entries, promoting the show, managing the budget and preparing the exhibition space. More than 750 people, mostly teens, attended the opening reception for the show.

The council also publishes a calendar of events at the Walker, separate from the museum’s standard events publication, that the teens think will be of interest to their peers. *Fig. 12*, written and designed by the council, uses the language of young people and is often irreverent, cynical or just plain quirky. Published four times during the school year, the publication is steadily growing in circulation. Council members and other teen program participants currently distribute more than 6,000 copies of *Fig. 12* at their schools and other gathering places.

**For help in making  
the museum look  
fresh and less  
businesslike to teens,  
the museum relies  
on a Teen  
Arts Council.**

“We help make the museum look fresh in the eyes of teens and less businesslike,” said Meghan Sovell, a senior at South High School and a founding member of the Teen Arts Council and contributor to *Fig. 12*. “At first, the message we got from the Walker was that we can’t be too crazy or ‘out there.’ But we’ve helped the museum be more open-minded about teens.”

Sovell sparked interest among the Teen Arts Council to bring the Guerilla Girls, a group of women artists and arts activists, to the Walker for a public program that she helped produce. At a sold-out event with many teens in attendance, the Guerilla Girls read from their books, answered questions from the audience and performed a skit about how one major American museum refused to showcase women artists and artists of color.

“We wanted to present a program that would be challenging to young people,” said Sovell. “A lot of teens think that discrimination against women or a need for the women’s movement no longer exists; Guerilla Girls demonstrated that’s just not true.”

“These young people are teaching us how to better communicate and collaborate with diverse audiences,” said Coffey. “In turn, I think we’ve proven to them we’re listening and supporting their interests and experiences. Many of them used to think of the Walker as elitist, but now they know it’s a safe space where they can question things in a way they’re not encouraged to at home or in school.”

# Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

## *Finding New Friends in Old Places*

### Lessons Learned:

- **Successful partnerships with community organizations can create trust and inspire relationships with new audiences.**
- **Local artists can help develop quality programs—as well as generate community attention.**
- **Collaboration reinforces the value of the museum to a community and can lead to new resources for doing its work.**

It was startling for the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston to learn how few of its visitors came from neighborhoods immediately surrounding it. That finding was one of the first—and most important—to emerge from the museum's early efforts to research its audience and think about ways to expand it.

In the early 1990s, the museum learned through audience studies that the most common barriers to attendance are a lack of information about programs and limited free time. Respondents also said there wasn't enough in the museum that related to their culture. Accepting this as its challenge, the MFA, Houston vowed to make its collection—the Southwest's largest and most comprehensive encyclopedic collection—meaningful to people living nearby. In 1993, it launched *A Place for All People*, an initiative funded in part by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund as part of its Museum Collections Accessibility Initiative.

Five years later, the museum can take pride in the relationships it has established with its neighbors as well as in the breadth and volume of innovative programming available to all Houston residents. In fact, the museum recently received national recognition for its work when it was honored by the Institute of Museum and Library Services at a White House ceremony for its community programming and education services.

Specifically, the award cited *Artists and Schools at Work*, a program that is reaching residents of the city's East End.



Teachers and students from the East End work on special projects with local artists through *Artists and Schools at Work*.

**“Any museum that isn’t relevant to its community will have a hard time surviving.”**

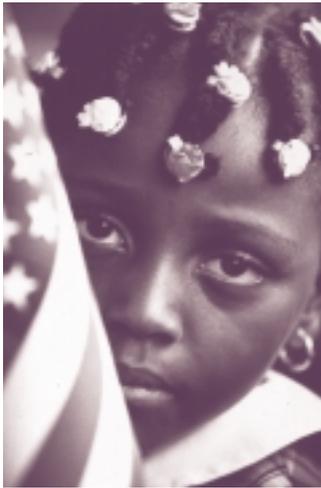
**—Peter Marzio**

In addition to the East End, a large Latino community, other neighborhoods that now represent a mainstay of the museum’s audiences are the Third Ward, an historic, predominantly African American section of the city, and Near Northwest, an ethnically and racially diverse working-class neighborhood. The reason to serve these communities, and others as well, is summed up by Museum Director Peter Marzio. “Any museum that isn’t relevant to its community will have a hard time surviving,” he said.

The MFA, Houston’s overall success in becoming “a place for all people” comes from a strategy that marries programming and community outreach. Through *Artists and Schools at Work*, teachers and students at seven East End schools work with local artists in the museum and in the community to create new works of public art for neighborhood sites. They find their inspiration in the museum’s permanent collection—in objects as diverse as contemporary sculptures, Navajo blankets, Renaissance paintings and pre-Columbian art. The resulting murals, paintings, sculptures, quilts, masks and gardens, created by the students and the artists, have been permanently installed at schools and community centers.



*Jubilee-Ghana Harvest Festival*, a painting from MFA Houston’s permanent collection by John Biggers—a resident of the Third Ward—has inspired several museum-sponsored community projects, including a mural at a local middle school.



Photographs from the MFA, Houston's permanent collection, such as the one on top, have motivated local high school students to master photography. A goal is for their photographs to appear in special exhibitions at the museum, as did the bottom photo by Angela Lockhart, a student at Jack Yates High School.

“Five years is really only enough time to start this type of work,” said Beth Schneider, the museum's education director. Yet, in that short span, the museum has already attracted more than 600,000 people to exhibitions and programs developed through its audience-building initiative. It also has made measurable inroads in target communities. In a 1996-97 telephone survey of 400 Third Ward residents, 33 percent of respondents said they'd attended the museum—an increase of nearly 50 percent over three years.

Another challenge the museum is beginning to overcome, according to Schneider, is “the public's expectation that the only activity of a museum is presenting exhibitions.” While major exhibitions have drawn large numbers of visitors from target communities, the most effective way to develop relationships with new audiences, she says, “is through events held in conjunction with exhibitions that highlight a community's culture or local artists.” This provides the museum the opportunity to involve schools, community-based organizations, youth and families in a range of activities. MFA, Houston's efforts in this area include:

- An invitation to five artists from the Third Ward to create new works based on pieces from the permanent collection. Because of this project's overall success—artistically, educationally and in terms of audience participation—a year later the program was broadened to include a wider cross-section of the community. Physicians, teachers, ministers, journalists, poets and a city councilman offered their thoughts and comments on pieces in the permanent collection through written testimonials, poems, performance art, photographs, videotapes and memoirs, which were featured in a special exhibition with the works.
- *Artists at Work*, a project in which four Latino artists from the East End were asked to create murals inspired by works in the permanent collection. Using one of the museum's galleries as their studio, the artists

worked over several months during public hours so visitors could watch them and follow their progress—a new experience for most people.

- A partnership with Jack Yates High School in the Third Ward, the first of many the museum has made with schools. Working with a photography teacher at the school, the museum made its photography collection available to students and offered its staff as a resource. Students so enthusiastically and imaginatively photographed their impressions of their community that museum curators organized an exhibition of the best student work. From 4,000 photos taken over two years, the museum created *Eye on the Third Ward*, which featured 50 images of the people and places the students encounter daily in their neighborhood. The show drew thousands of people, not only from the Third Ward, but the entire city. Response was so great that the exhibition toured churches and community centers throughout Houston, and the student photo exhibit has become an eagerly anticipated, annual event at the museum.



Celebrating at *Songs of My People*, an MFA, Houston Family Festival.

This partnership has had a profound effect on the museum and the students, their school and the community. The museum had rarely exhibited student work; now it's a regular occurrence. And the photography students at Jack Yates High School have a much different attitude about the museum. In the past, they rarely, if ever, visited because they thought, “there’s nothing here we want to see.” Now, they ask their instructor if their photographs are good enough to hang in the museum.

According to Schneider, these programs and other museum community outreach programs have succeeded because they break down preconceived ideas about art, artists and museums. “Bringing young people and their families face to face with artists over an extended period of time and involving them in the creative process helps demystify art and art-making,” she said.

Marzio contends that the programs work because they are presented without diminishing the museum’s usual standards for quality of work and

**The museum guards against bending its standards or quality; pandering or offering second-rate material doesn't help broaden audiences.**

presentation. He said, "You can't broaden audiences by pandering or offering second rate material."

In addition to these partnerships, the museum considers among its greatest successes the relationships it has formed with community-based organizations. "We realized from the outset that local organizations know the residents they serve better—and can reach them more effectively—than we could ever hope to," said Schneider.

In one particularly successful collaboration with a family literacy program called Go Forward, artists from the museum led quilting workshops for 40-50 school-age youngsters from the Near Northwest section of the city. Inspired by a quilt from the museum's permanent collection, each participant designed and stitched a 10" x 10" panel for a new quilt. Under the direction of the artists, students pieced their quilt together, which they called *Peace Works*. When it was complete, their quilt was displayed in the museum.

"The most exciting part for the kids was knowing their quilt was hanging alongside the works of the museum," said Reverend Mildred Henry, director of Go Forward. "This experience taught them what a museum is and its function in the community." She added that, in large part, due to its partnership with MFA Houston, Go Forward is planning to hire a full-time art director to coordinate similar projects.

Even with the endorsement of local organizations, it took almost two years in each community to establish trust and for working partnerships to take hold, demonstrating to the museum that alliances require constant and sustained attention to succeed. "We participate regularly in community events and meetings so people will see that we're serious about being part of their community," Schneider said. "Getting to know people this way demonstrates our commitment to wanting to understand what they want and need from our institution."

The rewards are evident. Not only did the museum experience a 44 percent increase in attendance at special exhibitions in 1997-98 over the previous year, but the success of the museum's current partnerships has helped forge new ones, ensuring continuation of this work. For example, the Houston Parks and Recreation Department has committed five years of funding to continue summer art programs in city parks, where young people create murals for city neighborhoods inspired by works in the museum's permanent collection. The parks department also organizes and transports groups of children to the museum once a month for *Sundays for Families*.

The museum's increase in audiences and expanded services to the community are reflected in a growing collection, substantial contributions to its endowment—and a successful capital campaign that has brought in \$112 million over the past two years. The convergence of these factors has sparked a major building expansion due for completion in 1999. "With the new space we will be able to reinstall much of the museum's collections and provide permanent galleries for American and 20th century art and works on paper," explained Schneider. The new facility will also feature more space for temporary exhibitions, a public studio for visitors to watch artists working, and a gallery for community exhibitions. Schneider continued, "This gives us the opportunity to exhibit more and different kinds of art as well as enhance the ways we work with people from all of Houston's communities."



Candy Torres, an artist from Houston's East End, used ideas and objects contributed by community members for a new work in the museum's collection.

### All artists aren't dead; they might be your neighbors

Local artists are proving to be effective liaisons to the communities that the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston is seeking to reach. Serving as community organizers, artists-in-residence and program leaders, they are helping introduce new visitors to the museum in ways that speak to people's everyday experiences. Marsha Dorsey, a painter and collage artist from the Third Ward, and Candy Torres, a sculptor who resides in East End, are two artists who have left a lasting imprint on the museum and their communities.

"Most people don't realize that artists live in their neighborhoods," said Dorsey, who was artist-in-residence for the Third Ward for two years and currently serves as program manager for Near Northwest, another of the museum's target communities. Active in many Third Ward organizations, Dorsey believes that being known in the neighborhood made her job as artist-in-residence easier. "When people could see me in a variety of venues—at their school, park or community center—they became comfortable with me, my work and the idea of the museum."

Dorsey designed and led *Inspired by Africa*, a summer mask-making workshop for young people in the Third Ward. Using works from the museum's African collection as a basis for discussion about cultural identity, the kids met in groups to draw and write about their ideas. They made 175 masks, which were exhibited at the museum with an opening reception for the artists and their families, friends and neighbors. The exhibition toured Houston for a year, including a stop at City Hall.

Dorsey has organized and led similar community-based art programs throughout the city. "Art becomes more relevant when people have an experience creating it. As they become comfortable viewing and talking about it, the myth that museums are only for those who've studied art is dispelled."

**The relevance of art to people's daily lives becomes more apparent when they have an opportunity to create it, view it and talk about it.**

This is especially true, she said, of kids. “After five years, many adults still aren’t thinking about the museum as much as we’d like, but kids are bringing relatives, which makes me think that they’re beginning to see it as their museum.”

Candy Torres participated in *Artists at Work*, a program where four local artists used a museum gallery as their studio to create murals inspired by works from the permanent collection. Torres wanted to create a work that captured the feeling of the predominantly Mexican-American East End. Using photos contributed by community residents, she created sculptural images from a variety of objects that represent the people, places and culture of the neighborhood.

To help guide the process, Torres encouraged visitors to talk about her mural. One family contributed their grandmother's rosary from Mexico. A museum guard proposed the use of broken glass to represent the steps of the Temple of Chichén Itzá. After surrounding an area of the mural that represents a Mayan sculpture from the permanent collection with images of petroglyphs, Columbus, conquistadors, the cross and the Sacred Heart, Torres listened to what people had to say. “Although the interpretations offended some Mexican Americans, others said it captured their experience of living in both Indian and Christian cultures,” she said.

Even when Torres wasn’t working, the mural was always on display. During those times, visitors were able to write comments and questions about the project, to which Torres always responded. “It's important for people to see artists at work and ask questions,” she explained. “I want them to know there is no right or wrong way of looking at art.”

Torres' work continues to elicit responses at the Chicano Family Center, where it's permanently installed. “People tell me they can't walk by it without seeing something new every time.” She added, “When people are able to appreciate the richness of their culture even in the most common or ordinary settings, they see that the objects of their daily life are valuable and rich.”

# Toledo Museum of Art

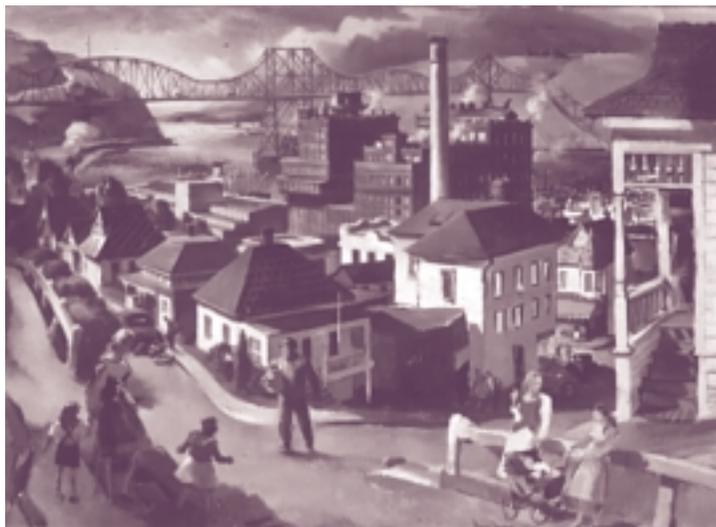
## *Interests of Local Employers and Museum Merge in Toledo*

### Lessons Learned:

- **Helping people explore their individual artistic interests can foster appreciation for a variety of art forms.**
- **Willingness to respond to a partner’s needs—even if it’s risky—can result in new visitors to the museum.**
- **Responding to people’s perceptions of the museum demonstrates the museum’s commitment to serving audiences.**

Hopes are riding high at the Toledo Museum of Art, where the institution’s mission has been recast to make serving audiences a primary focus. Described by one employee as a “jewel box of a museum in a teamster setting,” the museum is dedicated to drawing in more of the working people who make up a large percentage of the city’s population.

Through *Art & the Workplace*, an initiative designed to reach a broad cross-section of people where they work, programs held at workplace locations introduce people to the museum’s permanent collection and encourage them to create art themselves. “By targeting the workplace, we can reach the whole spectrum of Toledo,” explained Stef Stahl, the project’s initial director. “We learned through research that people are spending more time at their jobs—



*Factory Town*, a painting by Barse Miller from the Toledo Museum of Art’s permanent collection, captures the reputation of the people of that city as hardworking—and provides an illustrative backdrop for *Art & the Workplace*.

**Finding out about people's artistic pursuits helps the museum develop programs that are designed to appeal to specific interests.**

and often socializing in that context. Workplaces can give us access to existing social and communications networks that will help us in our efforts to reach new audiences.”

Since July 1997, the museum has formed partnerships with 18 Toledo employers. They range from hospitals and automotive plants with more than 5,000 employees to an architectural firm with just 10 employees. At the outset of each new partnership, the museum invites the company or organization to name an employee to serve on the museum's Workplace Advisory Committee. Then the museum distributes a written survey to every employee of partner companies to find out people's artistic interests. Employees are asked questions such as: “Are you involved in the creative or performing arts, and if so, which ones?” “Do you collect anything?” “What areas of the arts are you interested in learning about?”

The results reveal people's creative pursuits outside of work—from woodworking and quilting to painting and writing poetry. Using these findings, the museum has begun to develop a variety of programs designed to appeal to specific interests.

One example is lunchtime programs, where museum educators bring slide programs of artwork from the museum's permanent collection and creative activities to the workplace. In one, a presentation on Impressionism was followed by an invitation to paint with watercolors. For a major show that featured the fashion designs of Geoffrey Beene, employees were invited to preview the exhibition in slides and then provided giant paper dolls for which to design their own fashions. Lunchtime programs have attracted an average of 15 to 20 people each. “That may seem modest, but it's important to identify people with a ready interest,” said Stahl. “Their enthusiasm is infectious.”

Although the museum is reaching many new people through these efforts—more than 2,000 in 1997-98—museum officials say some companies have had to be encouraged to offer the program to all employees. For example, one

**By taking steps to better serve people, the museum and its visitors are both benefiting from the changes.**

construction firm initially restricted participation to managers, and several manufacturing companies have hosted programs at their headquarters but not at their plants, which are sometimes in separate locations. “Breaking through these hierarchies is more difficult than expected,” Stahl said. “We’re working hard to dispel any notions that the museum is only interested in reaching executives.”

With each *Art & the Workplace* program, the Toledo Museum of Art distributes free tickets to exhibitions, offers family programs and creates opportunities to volunteer at the museum, hoping to reach people who haven't participated in *Art & the Workplace* as well as those who don't come to the museum at all. Among these people, many say they prefer leisure-time activities that offer social opportunities, a place to meet people and spend time with family and friends, characteristics that are inconsistent with their perception of museums as solitary and contemplative.

In response, the Toledo Museum of Art is working to prove that the museum experience can be interactive. It has created a large public space on its main floor that features a café and seating. In connection with the café's opening in December 1997, the museum held a month-long winter holiday celebration. A tree was decorated with ornaments made by children, a satellite gift shop opened for holiday gift buying, and a collection of wax dolls with magnificent costumes was displayed for the first time in many years. In addition, more than 1,000 performers, mostly from Toledo churches, were showcased in choral and handbell concerts. The performances were announced from many pulpits and in many church bulletins. Attendance that month increased by 50 percent—or 9,000 people—over the previous year.

“For a long time, the public's perception of the Toledo Museum of Art has been one of a static place, without a face,” Stahl said. “We’re working to make people look at us in a new way. We exist to serve the public—and the changes here are as invigorating for the museum staff as they are for our visitors.”



Paul Clawson, an artist who works at the Jeep-Chrysler plant in Toledo, has helped organize employee exhibitions at the Toledo Museum of Art.

### **Assembling Jeeps by day and making art by night, line workers get a show at the Toledo Museum of Art**

When representatives from the Chrysler Corporation's local Jeep plant approached the Toledo Museum of Art in 1996 with a request to present an exhibition of art created by some of the auto manufacturer's 5,000 employees, the museum knew immediately that the idea, although unprecedented, was a good one.

"It was the first time any outside group had asked to use the museum in that way," said Stef Stahl, project director. "We never knew that so many people in our community go home in the evenings and on the weekends and paint, sculpt or make furniture."

The success of the Jeep workers' exhibition led the Toledo Museum of Art to design *Art & the Workplace*, an initiative that reaches people with art programs and services through their places of employment. "We knew that by identifying artists in a workplace, they could be advocates for the museum," said Stahl.

**Partnering with employees is helping the museum reach large numbers of people who paint, sculpt or make furniture during their hours away from work.**



Jeep employee Freddie M. Davis stands next to his pencil drawing *Famine Mother*.

To make employee exhibitions a regular feature, the museum created a community gallery—and the museum itself was the first group to use the new space. In July 1997, the museum presented an exhibition of 50 works submitted by 30 of its employees, which included paintings, sculptures, drawings, photos, quilts and mixed media. “We felt it was important to treat the museum as one of the initiative’s workplace partners—so the staff here would understand what we’re trying to accomplish,” explained Stahl.

Since then, several area employers have participated in the initiative. In fact, the second exhibition by Jeep employees recently concluded. One of the artists is Freddie M. Davis Sr., a 14-year Jeep employee who showed five paintings and drawings. Davis credits the experience with helping to renew his interest in his creative work. “When someone compliments my work, I really feel I’ve got a gift I should develop more,” he said. “I’ve gone from doodling to being more serious about my art.”



A wood sculpture of St. Francis of Assisi, created by Douglas W. Leonard, a die maker at the Chrysler Jeep Assembly plant, was featured in *The Toledo Blade*, the city's daily newspaper.

Davis, who is 39 and the father of three, cultivated his talent in high school, but had only drawn sporadically over the years since then. Despite the 54-hour weeks he regularly puts in on the job, Davis manages to find the time for his creative work. “Once I sit down to work, I forget about time,” he said. “When the artists meet before one of our shows, we share our experiences. Everyone says it’s so hard to put down their artwork—even when you have to be at the plant at six in the morning.”

Davis also participated in a Jeep Artists’ Day program at the museum. He said he encourages his teen-age children, who also show artistic talent, to visit the museum and take inspiration from its collection.

The museum is currently developing a general exhibition of work by employees whose companies haven't planned their own shows. The opening day will also feature an *Art & the Workplace* Family Festival, in which employees with performing talents will take the stage. “We’re happy to offer people the opportunity to expand their horizons and use an institution that in their eyes has a lot of influence,” said Stahl. “Dispersing the power is what this initiative is about.”

# The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

## *Start with the Children*

### Lessons Learned:

- **The opportunity to meet and work with artists directly can increase people’s appreciation and respect for a museum.**
- **Artists can help make people feel comfortable with works that may be unfamiliar to them.**
- **Reaching out to children through their schools can lead to an entire family’s participation.**



As part of a MOCA, Los Angeles effort to attract more young people and their families to the museum, students stand with artist Alberto Giacometti’s *Tall Figure II* and *Tall Figure III*.

Nearly three years ago, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA) resolved to make the museum a regular destination for parents and children. Until then, it was mostly attracting single, affluent, childless visitors. Exploring the range of available options, the museum devised a three-prong strategy: Find ways to display and interpret its extensive permanent collection of post-1940s art so it would appeal to families; enlist artists whose works are on display to design special installations and participate in public workshops; and reach out directly to schools and family organizations.

So far, museum officials are pleased with the way this work is unfolding.

An example is an exhibition called *Elusive Paradise*, which explores how Los Angeles culture, commerce and industry influence the work of local artists. Visitors enter the show through the orientation gallery that California artist John Outterbridge transformed into a typical Los Angeles stucco bungalow. The purpose was twofold—to make people feel at home when they walked through the door of the Geffen Contemporary, one of MOCA’s two sites, and to help visitors see the links between examples of everyday life represented in the bungalow—furniture, old family photos, model cars and airplanes, vintage movie posters and original works of art—and many of the themes explored in the show, such as Hollywood, popular culture and the aerospace industry.

**Meeting people  
face-to-face gives  
artists the  
opportunity to  
clarify and interpret  
their work directly  
to the public.**

“Outterbridge has been instrumental to the success of this exhibition,” says Kim Kanatani, director of education. “His installation provides visitors the keys to unlock the show.” The experience also confirms the museum’s hunch that artists themselves can be “the most effective educators for bridging the gap between art and the viewer.”

According to MOCA director Richard Koshalek, the museum’s new approach of reaching families through their children’s schools is also proving effective. In 1997-98, the museum worked with nearly 1,200 elementary, middle and high school students from a variety of schools over of an entire school year—and used the opportunity to encourage young people to visit the museum with their families. “Children, unlike adults, don’t have a reluctance to deal with contemporary art,” he said. “They’re very open and can be great teachers to their parents.”

Opportunities to meet and learn from the artists face-to-face also have been a big hit, museum officials say. Throughout the year, MOCA invites artists to consider themes, issues or ideas in the permanent collection and develop and present related weekend workshops. Typically offered for free, the workshops include gallery explorations, an art-making project and sometimes a visit to the artist’s studio.



A family gallery designed by artist John Outterbridge welcomes visitors to *Elusive Paradise*.



Local artist George Herms has collaborated with MOCA, Los Angeles to present studio lectures about assemblage, an art form used in his *California Landscaping*, which is part of the museum's collection.

During one such visit, artist George Herms, who works near the Geffen Contemporary, gave a slide presentation at his studio on the history of assemblage, an artform that incorporates the use of gathered objects for a collage-like sculpture. Herms engaged visitors in a discussion about his art on view, and guided them in his use of materials for his works.

Attendance at the workshops, which often include literary as well as visual artists, has ranged from 30 to 70 people. “Engaging families in a face-to-face experience with collection artists has been magical, sometimes more magical than the art itself,” said Kanatani. “In fact, workshops and other public programs give the artists the opportunity to clarify and interpret their work directly to the public. As a result, artists and visitors have greater respect for the museum.”

MOCA has been so encouraged by the outcome of *Elusive Paradise* that the museum is planning three more major permanent-collection shows for its initiative, and all will feature family orientation galleries. “Because our audience was so different, we couldn't have done these shows ten years ago,” said Koshalek. “But our collection and our strategies have evolved to speak to a broader audience. It's an exciting time for us.”

## Photo Credits

Cover background photo: Houston artist Ibsen Espada works on a mural inspired by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's permanent collection as part of the museum's Artists at Work program. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Page 5: The Listening Project; Student Madeline Fairbanks performs a dance inspired by Sigmar Polke's 1991 canvas *Frau Herbst und ihre zwei Töchter* (Mrs. Autumn and Her Two Daughters); Walker Art Center. Page 6: Joseph Beuys, *We Are The Revolution*, 1972, photostat on polyester sheet with handwritten text, stamped; 1997 Estate of Joseph Beuys/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Pages 6-11 and cover: Photos courtesy of Walker Art Center. Pages 13, 16, 19 and cover: Photos courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Page 14: John Biggers, *American*, b. 1924, *Jubilee Ghana Harvest Festival*, 1959, mixed media on canvas; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Museum purchase with funds provided by Panhandle Eastern Corporation. Page 15: Keith Hadley, *USA: Florida, Miami, Young Girl with Flag*, Miami; gelatin silver photograph; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; *The Songs of My People* Collection, Gift of Warner Cable, Time Warner Inc., and *New Africa Visions*. Angela Lockhart, Yates High School Photography Student, *Untitled*, 1997; black and white photograph. Created for the exhibition *Eye on the Third Ward 3: Yates Magnet High School Photography Exhibition*, August 31-October 26, 1997. Page 21: Barse Miller, *Factory Town*, 1948, Toledo Museum of Art. Page 24: Brian R. Tolbert, *BRT Photographic Illustrations*. Pages 25-26: Photos courtesy of Toledo Museum of Art. Page 27 and cover: Students Standing with Alberto Giacometti's *Tall Figure II* (1960) and *Tall Figure III* (1960); The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Rita and Taft Schreiber Collection. Page 28: Photo courtesy of Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Page 29: George Herms, *California Landscaping*, 1978, mixed media; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; photo by Paula Goldman.

## Appendix

### *Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund* *Museum Collections Accessibility Initiative* Participants and Contacts

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