Reinventing Museum Labels:
Overcoming an Archetype with Technology
and Visitor-Centered Label Writing

by Katherine Liss Saffle

Book Review:
Culture, Identity and Education

by Dace Demir

Book Review:
Sport, History, and Heritage.
Studies in Public Representation

by Katrina Menard

Book Review:
Curating Human Remains: Caring for the
Dead in the United Kingdom

by Lindsay Maass

Edited by Michael A. Mares

URL: http://jms.ou.edu

CLS Journal of Museum Studies is currently published online by the College of Liberal Studies, MALS Museum Studies Program, the University of Oklahoma.

Your use of the CLS Journal of Museum Studies archives indicates your acceptance of the Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://jms.ou.edu. Museum professionals, students, and other readers are encouraged to distribute the articles published in this journal as widely as possible, to use them in classes, and to reprint them as needed. For commercial use of any of these articles (e.g., charging for articles, republishing figures, tables, text, etc.), permission must be obtained from the Editor. All questions relating to the journal should be directed to the Editor.

Publisher contact information available at http://jms.ou.edu.

Each copy of any part of a CLS Journal of Museum Studies transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or PDF file of such transmission.

CLS Journal of Museum Studies is an independent not-for-profit publication dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly articles in the field of museum studies. For more information regarding CLS Journal of Museum studies, please contact Dr. Michael A. Mares at mamares@ou.edu.

http://jms.ou.edu
Publication date: June 2013
The CLS Journal of Museum Studies is issued annually (with individual numbers appearing as they are completed) by the College of Liberal Studies, MALS Museum Studies Program of the University of Oklahoma. The CLS Journal of Museum Studies is designed to provide a worldwide e-journal as a publication outlet for students enrolled in the Museum Studies Program of the College of Liberal Studies of the University of Oklahoma. The journal is also designed for use by faculty in the CLS MALS program. Any topic of relevance to the field of museum studies is considered suitable for publication in the journal.

Contributions may be solicited by the Editor from museum professionals not affiliated with the MALS Museum Studies Program. Please contact the editor directly if you wish to publish in the CLS Journal of Museum Studies.

All submissions are reviewed by one or more members of the Editorial Board or by outside reviewers.

Cover Photograph: Aerial view of the Sam Noble Museum (Photo by Fred Welch, Welch Creative).
Journal Editor
Dr. Michael A. Mares, Director, Sam Noble Museum and Joseph Brandt Professor, Department of Biology, University of Oklahoma

Editorial Board
Gail Kana Anderson, Assistant Director/Curator of Collections, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma

Marcia Britton, Executive Director, Wyoming Council for the Humanities, Laramie, WY

Byron Price, Director, University of Oklahoma Press and Charles M. Russell Center for the Study of Art of the American West, University of Oklahoma

Dr. Mary Jo Watson, Director and Regents' Professor, School of Art and Art History, University of Oklahoma

Dr. Daniel C. Swan, Associate Curator of Ethnology and Associate Professor of Anthropology, Sam Noble Museum, University of Oklahoma

The CLS Journal of Museum Studies is published annually by the College of Liberal Studies, MALS Museum Studies Program, the University of Oklahoma

Manuscripts submitted for the Journal and all correspondence concerning them should be addressed to Dr. Michael A Mares. Guidelines for contributors are given on the last page of this volume.

Copyright © 2013 by the College of Liberal Studies, University of Oklahoma

Laid out by Kaitlin Phillips, on a format established by Dr. Michael A. Mares.
## Table of Contents

Foreword  
*by Michael A. Mares*  
vi

Reinventing Museum Labels:  
Overcoming an Archetype with Technology and Visitor-Centered Label Writing  
*by Katherine Liss Saffle*  
1

*by Dace Demir*  
17

*by Katrina Menard*  
27

Book Review: Curating Human Remains: Caring for the Dead in the United Kingdom  
*by Lindsay Maass*  
31
Foreword: Exhibits and Labels

Michael A. Mares

Sam Noble Museum and Department of Biology,
University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK

E-mail: mamares@ou.edu

Museum exhibits and the accompanying labels are always a challenge for museums of natural history. Unlike art museums, for example, which may hang a picture on a wall with a minimalist label, a natural history museum must interpret specimens, dioramas, scientific concepts, and topics ranging from the history of the planet to evolutionary theory across a wide variety of organisms, including humans. Ideally labels will help provide continuity for the visitor across galleries and across the museum. While labels should be easily readable and unobtrusive, they should aspire to leave the visitor with a sense of beauty, appropriateness, and expert information. Too much information, or as young people say today, TMI, can be off putting, or even lead to a visitor leaving the exhibit in frustration. Too little information and the visitor may feel that they are being talked down to by the museum or they may not understand the concepts being illustrated.

Every label is a challenge to the curators, the educators, and the exhibit designers. Some concepts are routinely discussed in entire textbooks, yet the exhibit may only permit 50 or 100 words on a few labels. If the job is done properly, visitors will come away with a very positive feeling for the exhibit experience and
will also feel that they have learned something new, viewed their world in a unique manner, and felt or understood concepts that they may not have encountered before within the context of object-based exhibits. One can read about a dinosaur in a book or see a fossil on television, but coming face to face with a giant 95-foot Apatosaurus in a natural history museum is an unforgettable experience. Minimally, visitors should learn that the animal is an apatosaur, but the creature must also be placed in its proper context—What did it eat? Where was it found? How old is it? What other dinosaurs did it live with? Why are they no longer around?

Clearly some of these questions can and should be illustrated with other specimens, but graphics are required to show dinosaur relationships, to make clear the effects of an asteroid hitting the earth, and to inform visitors of the complex dinosaur communities of the past. In our museum, almost every specimen on display came from Oklahoma and together the exhibits illustrate the history of this piece of real estate across more than a billion years of time. As a unit, therefore, we tell a complete story to the visitor as s/he moves through the exhibits and travels across time. This is never explicitly stated as a design concept in the exhibits and labels, but gradually visitors learn that Oklahoma is a remarkable place in that much of the history of life can be told using specimens from the state.

The Sam Noble Museum also includes ethnological and archeological collections, as well as art collections that include Native American paintings and sculpture. Interpretation of Native American materials through museum labels may be challenging in that the religious context of objects must be considered, as well as the ways in which they are displayed. Such things matter a great deal to many visitors. These materials demand respect, understanding, and sensitivity. Another major collection of the museum is the Native American Language Collection. Languages are recorded, studied, and preserved in the museum and are used in teaching and research on the many languages of Oklahoma and of other states as well. Exhibit labels that are used as part of the museum’s annual Youth Language Fair may be in English and in other languages such as Cherokee, Seminole, Navajo, or any of the other 35 plus tribes that participate in the Youth Fair activities each year.

Kate Saffle recently completed her Masters in Museum Studies at the University of Oklahoma. Her thesis examined how museum labels are changing in their design and presentation, and in their ability to enhance the visitor experience.

All American and All Pro football player, Roy Williams (museum Board member), is “devoured” by a giant spider that was part of the exhibit Beautiful Beasts.
experience in museums. Her work illustrates how complex the apparently simple task of making a label has become in recent years. She notes that “label writing” may now require the skills of a graphic artist and a computer technician, as well as the significant subject expertise provided by curators. Labeling an exhibit for maximum effect on the visitor—whether to educate, entertain, or edify—has become a specialized and complex challenge in museums. If labels are done properly, both the visitor and the museum will benefit. Labels are clearly a major factor in how people learn from objects and how they respond to the work of a small army of museum specialists who are dedicated to improving the visitor experience.

This issue of the CLS Journal of Museum Studies also includes three book reviews: The Story of Irish Museums by Dace Demir, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Museum Studies at the University of Oklahoma; Sport, History and Heritage by Katrina Menard, Assistant Curator of Invertebrates at the Sam Noble Museum (and an excellent athlete in her own right); and Curating Human Remains by Lindsay Maass, graduate student in Biological Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology and Sam Noble Museum at OU.

Beautiful Beasts Exhibit (spider photos by Thomas Shahan), Sam Noble Museum
Reinventing Museum Labels: Overcoming an Archetype with Technology and Visitor-Centered Label Writing

Katherine Liss Saffle

“Many people who don’t visit museums think of them as forbidding, difficult, unchanging, and of no immediate relevance.” (Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and Their Visitors, p. 19-20)

As 21st century museums seek ways to reach wider audiences and compete with other entertainment options, technology is an attractive option. According to technology writer, Giles (2010), and researchers Angst and Malinowski (2010), devices such as smart phones, tablets, and electronic book readers, QR codes and barcodes are already impacting museums and their usage is destined to increase with time. One aspect
that these devices share in common is their ability to provide supplemental information about an exhibition. Writing concise labels is often a difficult but important task. Many leading label-writing experts, such as Serrell (1996) and Rand (2010), recommend keeping exhibition labels to a fifty-word maximum. Newer technology products, such as tablet or smart phone applications, can fill a need for secondary information within the exhibition and reduce the number of complex wall labels. Such devices used with a well-defined role of providing informational support for the objects can be highly beneficial to visitors and can augment the visitor experience.

Traditions exhibit in gallery, Sam Noble Museum

Abstract. Labels play a necessary role in any exhibition, acting as silent ambassadors for the museum by providing information and object interpretation. However, labels are also subject to the biases and perceptions of the writer, the exhibition, and the institution, which can create a breakdown in communication between the museum visitor and reception of key information. The question then is how to write labels that open the lines of communication with all audiences without discouraging the scholarly work of museum professionals. This report discusses the basic mechanics of label writing and best practices, including such considerations as building communication, the ideal exhibition environment, and label content. Also considered is the impact of such issues as visitor museum fatigue and accessibility. An overview of current technologies that have merit in the museum setting, such as smart phone applications, computer tablets, and barcodes, is also discussed, while keeping in mind potential drawbacks of these newer forms of museum communication.

As technology becomes more commonplace in the public sphere, museums must find ways to incorporate digital methods of communication. According to Falk and Dierking (2008), many museum visitors begin selectively reading labels within 5-15 minutes after viewing their first exhibition. There is a need in the museum sphere to reconsider the archetypal label—one that is overly long, perpetuates one-way communication, and in general, is not visitor-friendly—and explore the possibilities of visitor-centered label writing and the potential use of technology. This paper seeks to review past and current literature on the design of museum labels as well as provide recommendations for writing labels that encourage successful museum-visitor communication while considering the implementation of new technologies.

Traditions exhibit labels of individuals, Sam Noble Museum
audience in and beyond the immediate community. Writing effective labels is a learned art that requires an understanding of effective and efficient communication in order to reach a broad audience. Many writers have explored the technicalities of label writing and considered such factors as typography, length, and fabrication. Few, however, have addressed the broader aspects of the subject. Too often, heady academic research trumps the practicalities of visitor needs in the writing of labels. Writing labels requires the museum professional not only to think creatively and succinctly, but also to be willing to role-play the part of the visitor. It is important that the needs of the audience as far as label text is concerned be given priority. A well-written label, according to Serrell (1996), builds dialogue, feeds intellectual curiosity, and minimizes common pitfalls such as museum fatigue and accessibility issues. Others in the field, such as Rand (2010), MacManus (1989), and Screven (1992), have taken a broader, visitor-centered approach to label writing.

The breadth of exhibition research can overwhelm label writing. It might be useful to imagine all labels—introductory, section, object, and interpretative—as contributors to an overarching theme or story based upon the “big idea.” Hooper-Greenhill (1994:133) states that: “[It] is very difficult to write or compile texts unless the objectives of the exhibition overall...are fully understood. Each piece of text should have a specific function and should be part of the system of communication as a whole.”

The image in Figure 1 showcases a common approach to exhibition introductory labels. Although it provides plenty of specific detail, one should question whether all of the content is necessary to meet the exhibition’s overall “big idea.” In general, if the label text does not contribute to the overall mission of the exhibition, it should be jettisoned. Falk and Dierking (1992) conducted a study that demonstrated that visitors find it nearly impossible to read every single label in an exhibition, let alone in an entire museum. This tendency to selectively read labels can be overcome, however, and the interest of the visitor can be captured and maintained through various label writing techniques.

**Guiding Questions**

All interpretive labels have a past, one that smacks of research, long meetings, and multiple editors. Their contents represent not only the exhibition team’s deepest held convictions on the topics at hand, but also represent how that information is presented to the general audience. If labels “speak” on behalf of the museum, how can one be sure they send the right message? Building dialogue around an object by posing questions in the label text is one way of encouraging successful
communication. Although this is common practice at science and history museums, it is not typical of art museums. The photograph in Figure 2 is an example of a traditional exhibition at an art museum, in which label copy is small, does not include guiding questions, and does not encourage much visitor interaction. Typically, object-based exhibitions do not offer opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning; they depend instead on an individual’s motivation or conversation between visitors that fosters information retention. Hohenstein and Tran (2007) found that adding a guiding question to a label resulted in increased conversation among visitors. A guiding question might be as simple as asking, What do you think this means? or What do you think the artist intended by using vivid colors and vigorous brushstrokes?

Fig. 2. Traditional art museum exhibition and accompanying labels. Photo courtesy of Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art

This technique is similar to methods used in some forward-thinking secondary schools. The label example in Figure 3 contains an open-ended question, thus fueling conversation and inquiry. Paulette McManus (1989), a visitor studies researcher, found that open-ended questions support critical thinking and knowledge building, whereas, closed forms of inquiry—ones that tell the viewer the expected answer—result in decreased learning and interaction.

Label writers might benefit from studying curriculum-writing methods such as Understanding By Design (UbD) (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005). This method encourages teachers to plan goals and desired outcomes prior to writing any lessons. Label writers can employ a similar approach in their work. Guiding questions are the foundation and focus of every UbD lesson plan. Questions are written so that they cannot be answered by a simple “yes” or “no”, but instead require critical thinking. The hope is that students will better understand the lesson by having opportunities to “explain, interpret, apply, shift perspective, empathize, and self-assess.” Wiggins and McTighe assert that guiding questions can provide a foundation upon which to write labels that are intellectually appealing and thought provoking.

Fig. 3. Guiding questions, such as the example above, are more commonly found in natural history and science museums (Photo by Katherine Saffle).
Optimal Learning Environment

Regardless of age, education level, or social class, most museum visitors desire to learn in a non-threatening environment (McManus 1989). Effective labels stimulate rather than discourage the visitor's intellectual curiosity. Phillip Wright, a freelance museum researcher, notes the tendency of museum professionals to use label writing to fulfill their own scholarly desires, often to the disadvantage of the visitor. He writes:

Satisfying their own needs and expectations should be a low priority for such a public service as an art museum, and indeed they should be served last. Catering for generalists (non-art specialists, who do not work full-time in art) should be the first priority, followed by that of developing new audiences (Wright 1989:120).

In her book Making Visitors Mindful, Moscardo (1999), describes two ways in which miscommunication might arise between museum and visitor. Exhibition information written in a complicated manner that surpasses audience competency represents one possibility. In some cases a visitor believes he or she is familiar with the topic of the exhibition, but actually is not. This misinformation might affect the visitor's ability to retain the ideas being communicated. The ultimate goal of the exhibition, however, is for the visitor's knowledge to be relevant and shared in common with the museum.

According to Falk and Dierking, each museum visitor processes his or her exhibit encounter through “the lens of previous knowledge, experience, and beliefs” (Falk and Dierking 1992:136). Museum professionals have the difficult task of discovering what information the visitor and the museum share and proceed from there. This approach will require a radical retuning of exhibition planning and design. Rather than deciding what the museum would like the visitor to know, the museum must instead ask what the visitor hopes to learn.

Label Content

Exhibitions that are intellectually satisfying tend to present information to a visitor at an appropriate learning level and in an engaging manner that encourages curiosity. One way of meeting these goals is by writing labels with personality and character. Dry dense label copy can be boring and discouraging to visitors. Labels that ask questions, challenge convention, and are not afraid of a little humor, tend to draw visitors in and make learning fun. Labels can be appealing to a visitor's inquisitive nature by encouraging critical thinking and exploring new ways of looking and thinking about the subject at hand (Screven 1992, Chambers 2009). For example, a visitor who interacts and experiences art on a positive and personal level is more likely to remember the exhibition and internalize the “big picture.” By contrast, a visitor who feels incompetent reading labels or struggles to understand the meaning and purpose of an exhibition may be wary of visiting museums again, and might seek a learning experience elsewhere.

The tone and wording of the label also affects the visitor experience. Using a conversational tone appropriate to each individual exhibit setting encourages a positive reading experience. Imagine describing a highly technical art concept to a friend unfamiliar with the art world. It would be far better to describe the idea using words and phrases that are familiar and comfortable for the listener. Chambers (2009) encourages label writers to resist the urge to include too much “glib art historical gobbledygook.” Using highly
technical language, easily misinterpreted words and phrases, or abstract concepts, makes it challenging for most visitors. Both Serrell (1996:83-86) and Screven (1992:184-185) suggest that focusing on the sensorial aspects of the viewing experience instead allows the visitor to engage in a dialogue with the object at hand. Direct label text encourages the viewer to build a relationship with the object.

**Overcoming Museum Fatigue**

Another consequence of poorly worded and designed labels is visitor fatigue. Museum patrons often become tired, distracted, and overwhelmed by the many displays, objects, and labels they encounter during a visit. The onset of such feelings often reduces motivation and concentration and interferes with continued interaction with the exhibits. Falk and Dierking (1992) describe museum fatigue as an “inescapable phenomenon” and one that affects most visitors. Arthur Melton (1935) suggested long ago that too many objects crowded into gallery after gallery invariably lead to object-satiation. Label-satiation is often a contributor to museum fatigue—another term for sensory overload.

In the case of museum labels, less is certainly more. The typical museum label is often too wordy, overly academic, abstract, and generally overwhelming to the visitor. Chambers (2009) recommends using the “populist” or visitor-centric approach when writing labels. Rand (2010) recommends that keeping individual text panels to a fifty-word maximum will result in labels that visitors will actually want to read. Serrell (1996) furthers this idea by suggesting that any labels over 300 words be edited into fifty word segments. Visitors may not always read labels in their entirety, but rather scan for basic comprehension and to confirm previous knowledge or already held convictions about the topic. Furthermore, visitors are less likely to read an entire label if it is excessively wordy. Shorter texts fuel visitor conversation by including the museum experience into a visitor-to-visitor dialogue model.

**Making Labels More Accessible**

An additional issue that may arise in the exhibition is label accessibility. A variety of viewers need access to exhibition labels: children, adults, people in wheelchairs, and people with limited vision, among others. Serrell (1996) suggests choosing a legible label font that boosts recognition and comprehension of words and symbols. Common fonts such as Times Roman, Bodoni Book, Caslon, Century Old Style, or Optima are considered effective for use in most museum exhibitions, though this is certainly not an exclusive list given the enormous number of choices provided by most word processing and printing and graphics programs.

Label placement and font selection tend to go hand in hand. Lighting conditions in the gallery spaces, visitor distance from the label, and wheelchair accessibility, are also key considerations when placing labels. Labels should not be placed so low to the ground that a visitor must bend over or stoop just to read it. If space constraints necessitate placing a label where children or the disabled cannot read it, then handouts with the label text might be a useful addition to the gallery. Motivating the visitor to read the labels and to make the viewing experience easy and pleasurable is an important way to move beyond the archetypal label.

Label reading is hopefully an enjoyable and educational experience for visitors. Keeping patrons’ needs in mind from the earliest
planning sessions to the exhibit opening will ensure a visitor-centered museum experience. Following are several innovative ways to address issues related to exhibition labels by using cutting edge technology to construct creative labels and accompanying materials.

Innovative Labels

Schools, businesses, and public institutions are all experimenting with introducing new forms of communication through social media, mobile devices, and personal computers and tablets. An October 2009 survey by the U.S. Census Bureau found that 76.7% of American households have Internet access. 83% of all Americans own a cell phone of some kind. Technology use has indeed become interwoven into the pattern and routine of daily life. In President Barack Obama’s 2011 State of the Union address (Obama 2011), he discussed nationwide broadband Internet access:

This isn’t just about faster Internet or fewer dropped calls. It’s about connecting every part of America to the digital age. It’s about a rural community in Iowa or Alabama where farmers and small business owners will be able to sell their products all over the world. It’s about a firefighter who can download the design of a burning building onto a handheld device; a student who can take classes with a digital textbook; or a patient who can have face-to-face video chats with her doctor.

This seemingly romanticized view of technology is becoming a reality. The U.S. is on the path toward technological literacy and access, yet with all of the benefits of greater connectivity among Americans technology poses some concerns (Smith 2011).

As a former high school teacher, I had many students who wanted to use electronic devices in the classroom as study aids. While there were some worthwhile uses—such as reading e-books or to access digital copies of notes—there were equally, and perhaps more, ways for a student to misuse technology. In particular, I found that many of my students struggled to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate times to use these devices. A computer screen can also be an impediment to the lesson being taught in that it acts as a physical barrier between the student and the teacher. These growing concerns are indicative of a culture that has the technology, but has not properly developed boundaries for usage.

Museum professionals must be careful to link technology with guidance and instruction. Electronic devices have great potential, but should remain supplemental to the objects in a museum’s collection. The exhibition example shown in Figure 4—while found at a natural history museum and not in an art museum—demonstrates that an interactive computer device can be successfully and unobtrusively integrated into an overall exhibition. It has been my experience that laptops, or screens in general, provide a visual distraction and potential impediment to two-way communication. For example, in 2010 when tablets first hit the market, I had several instances in which students insisted on using a tablet to take notes during class discussions. However, these particular students had not mastered the ability to switch gears effectively between screen and chalkboard. They struggled to participate in classroom discussions because the tablet also demanded attention: saving and formatting their notes, looking up words in the digital dictionary, games, and even checking email. Likewise, students nearby were distracted by the glow of new technology. In time, I believe that
Tablets and similar devices will be a useful aid in the classroom, provided that students are educated in their proper use.

There are, however, several issues at hand for the museum contemplating electronic labels and/or device usage. First, it is necessary to consider the types and uses of technology that are most beneficial to the needs of museum visitors. The application of technology for special audiences needs and electronic media oversaturation concerns also should be addressed. One of the most promising uses for these devices in a museum setting is their application to exhibition labels and other printed museum materials. Technology adoption will also vary from museum to museum, as the increased costs of its development and maintenance must be factored into the museum budget.

Technology and the Museum

As 21st century museums seek ways to reach wider audiences and compete with other entertainment options, technology is an attractive option. According to Giles (2010) and Angst and Malinowski (2010) devices such as smart phones, tablets and electronic book readers, QR codes and barcodes are already impacting museums and their usage is destined to increase with time. One aspect that these devices share in common is their ability to provide supplemental information about an exhibition. Newer products such as tablet or smart phone applications can fill a need for secondary information within the exhibition and reduce the number of required wall labels.

The success of the newer technologies being utilized in museum exhibitions has yet to be measured. Statistics maintained on computer interactives, such as a “video game” learning interface, offer an idea of the usefulness of technology in the museum as well as changes needed to improve effectiveness. Although popular among science and natural history museums, research conducted by Serrell and

Fig. 4. Example of interactive screen integrated into an exhibition (Photo by Michael A. Mares).

Fig. 5. Touch screen interactive computer label. Photo courtesy of Sam Noble Museum (Photo by Katherine Saffle).

The success of the newer technologies being utilized in museum exhibitions has yet to be measured. Statistics maintained on computer interactives, such as a “video game” learning interface, offer an idea of the usefulness of technology in the museum as well as changes needed to improve effectiveness. Although popular among science and natural history museums, research conducted by Serrell and
Raphling (1992) found computer interactives typically engage only about 30% of all museum visitors. The low level of response might be due to a tendency for museums to treat the technology as the draw in itself, rather than as a tool for increasing exhibition understanding. The role of all technology in the exhibition, not just computer interactives, must be to offer a fluid learning experience that places the greatest importance on the objects themselves.

Another concern is that as technology rapidly changes, computer interactives will quickly become out of date. Museum staff must decide if it is truly worth the investment to keep such computer-based equipment updated as to content and applications that permit smooth operation of the technology. One way to circumvent this issue is to encourage visitors to use the technology they already own in tandem with the museum’s exhibitions.

Smart Phone Applications

Many museums are creating their own smart phone applications that can be used whether the user is in the galleries or at home. The National Gallery in London, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and the Louvre in Paris all offer an electronic guide to their collections and exhibitions. Resplendent with color images and teeming with useful information, these “apps” provide the user with an interactive experience. The institution has ultimate control of content, but visitors can explore concepts and visuals, in depth, at their own pace. Many of these programs provide guided digital “tours” of the collections, complete with object identification, interpretation, and full color images. Although museum “apps” for a cellular phone are typically designed for use in conjunction with the galleries at the museum, many such programs allow the visitor to take the museum home with them. This encourages continued communication with patrons once outside of the museum walls. For art lovers who might not be able to travel to certain museums, a smart phone application provides a virtual experience of the collections. According to Falk and Dierking (2008:28):

…digital media experiences have the potential to effectively situate the visitor’s museum experience within the broader context of an individual’s life, community, and society; they also have the potential to allow significant customization of experience and to extend visitor’s experiences beyond the temporal and physical boundaries of the institution.

In my experience, there is often a concern among museum professionals that providing too much access to museum information outside of the walls of the museum will decrease visitation numbers. Many museums include, as part of a larger mission statement, the goal of providing visitors with information about and access to the collections, exhibitions and publications. Weil (1990) states that despite the best intentions, visitors will create their own experiences and interpretations both inside and outside the physical bounds of the museum. Thus the museum cannot completely control the visitor experience. Cell phone applications, however, can be designed to offer an open-ended exhibition touring experience, ultimately broadening the definition of learning about collections while in the museum and outside its walls.

I found this to be my experience while listening in on a session at the 2009 College Art Association conference. The discussion was whether or not museums should digitize their
collections for the public. The overwhelming response was that virtual collections would decrease visitation. This is an assumption that all digital collection users actually have the potential to visit said museum. For people without the means to visit, digitization and online access provides an excellent learning tool and museum experience, though they may not actually visit the real museum. They clearly would benefit from a visit to the virtual museum.

**Computer Tablet**

Another technology that is gaining support in the museum setting is the computer tablet. These handheld screens can be preloaded with a variety of information to enhance visitor experience. Similar to the smart phone, a visitor can access the museum’s application and control the flow of information. There are several possible uses for these devices. As museums transition to shorter wall texts and interpretative labels, the tablet can provide more extensive information. Remembering that information overload often leads to museum fatigue, As Miles et al. (1982) noted concern among museum professionals about how to serve the many visitors who actually want further details about particular objects or concepts without overflowing the average visitor. This group of visitors typically constitutes a minority, but the capabilities of the tablet can be easily harnessed to address this concern. Tablets can also be used to aid vision impaired, elderly, and/or non-native language-speaking visitors.

Let us consider the needs of the vision impaired and elderly visitors who may have trouble reading the font on a wall panel. Although such visitors may still enjoy studying the actual objects, much of the interpretive content is lost. Although some museums are in the habit of providing large print guides to their galleries, tablets preloaded with many of the museum’s labels and gallery information provide a viable alternative. Visitors who need to view larger text can control the size of the font on the tablet. According to Hooper-Greenhill, larger texts not only aid the vision impaired, but also assist people with bifocals, reading difficulties, and even someone suffering from museum fatigue. A quick tutorial on how to use the device might also be beneficial to the user (Hooper-Greenhill 1992)

Preprogrammed tablets would also benefit non-native language speaking visitors who cannot read or read very well a particular language used in museum labels and exhibits. Tablets can typically translate wall texts and supplemental information into one or more secondary languages. This has several far-reaching benefits. First, it ensures content access to wider audiences beyond native speakers and encourages minority visitors. In addition, it reduces wall clutter by allowing museums to provide wall texts in one language rather than several. In countries where several languages are commonly used, it allows museums to meet visitors’ needs with limited gallery distraction. Given a text to voice program, visitors could utilize headsets to view exhibits silently while hearing the information. This would not only assist blind visitors, but also the illiterate or those who have a poor grasp of any written language.

The Finnish Science Centre in Heureka employed electronic screens embedded in tables supporting objects. The visitor could then select their language and read labels with ease. The museum found this a more suitable alternative to providing trilingual physical labels for Finnish, English, and French speakers. The institution later added Russian and Estonian to their offerings, further expanding their audience and ultimately encouraging
more tourism (Mylllykoski 2010).

Similarly, tablets could prove beneficial for visitors with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or other developmental disorders. Mohundro and Wicker (2010) argued that ADHD shares some similarities with other learning disabilities, particularly hyperactivity, inattention, impulsiveness and other behavioral problems (see also Riccio et al. 1994). For many children and adults facing these issues, a visit to a museum can be overwhelming. My experience as a teacher showed me that many of my students dealing with ADHD required a multi-sensory learning environment; such traditional learning methods as lectures and handouts were not beneficial. However, if students had the ability to control at least one aspect of their learning experience, concentration seemed to increase. By providing access to electronic media via tablets or barcodes, museums can help establish this important learning link and present visitors with ADHD with a more active museum experience.

A study of 9-12 year olds conducted by Tahiroglu et al. (2010) found that a short-term technology experience, such as playing a new video game, increased cognitive function and attention by increasing frontal/prefrontal lobe activity. Providing barcodes that link to videos, related images, even a gallery centered video game, encourages multiple ways of learning and knowledge retention. The more variety a museum provides for learning material, the greater likelihood of visitors retaining that knowledge and viewing their experience as a positive and useful one.

A final use for tablets, whether museum or visitor owned, is that they can provide access to electronic books. Although many museums are in the habit of producing expensive, large exhibition catalogs, an alternative might be electronic guidebooks. Museums could produce a streamlined version of their catalogue and publish it in electronic book format. Although many museums provide collection information and other digital offerings on their websites, electronic books written specifically for special exhibitions and novelty topics might act as a cost-effective way to distribute scholarly curatorial work. The museum could provide details about how to download their e-book to either one of their own tablets or to that of a visitor. The visitor could then access at least some of the catalog content while in the actual exhibition, thus providing a more integrated experience. Although there is concern that this could potentially diminish catalog sales, a simplified or abbreviated electronic catalog might appeal to a different audience than that which buys the hardcopy version.

Barcodes

Museums that are concerned with the financial and administrative complexities of owning and maintaining tablets may find barcodes to be a better alternative. Farkas suggests that a special two-dimensional barcode, called a QR code, is gaining traction in the marketing world and even in schools. Marketers are using it on bus ads and in magazines, while educators have found it useful for homework assignments that require additional explanation. Giles (2010) explains that a person can scan a barcode using an application on their phone and immediately access relevant content. The creator of the barcode has control over what content to release and can include texts, videos, and images. Its potential uses in a museum vary widely. For instance, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston does not use any wall labels alongside the art and objects.
Rather, there are paper guides to each gallery in the corresponding room. An alternate for a no-label museum like the Gardner could be to implement barcodes into the galleries either on the walls or on a paper handout. Barcodes, similar to the tablet, create a visitor-controlled experience and allow museums to embrace simpler wall texts or perhaps none at all (Farkas 2010).

Fig. 6. QR code. When scanned with appropriate application, will direct viewer to the CLS online Journal of Museum Studies website (Photo by Katherine Saffle).

**Drawbacks to Technology in the Museum**

The downside to tablets and barcodes is mostly financial and administrative. A robust local area network (LAN) must be in place as well as technicians to program and service the tablets or barcodes and maintain connectivity. Additionally, as expressed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2001), there is also concern that too much technology—whether in the museum, at schools or in the home—can prove long-term to be detrimental to cognitive functioning. The AAP has set limitations on screen time for children, and the long-term effects of technology use are yet to be determined. Technology should not be avoided, however, for fear of unknown factors and consequences.

The museum is a living entity, ever adapting to challenges and opportunities as these are presented. Museums must continue to evolve. Embracing technology is one way to do this. As society becomes more technologically inclined, so must its institutions and businesses. In addition, museums must compete with other cultural and entertainment offerings; a gallery cell phone application, tablet, or barcode option will encourage attendance by first-time visitors and perhaps even retain their loyalty by mimicking other technology based entertainment attractions. This approach also provides a more personalized visitor experience.

Falk and Sheppard (2006, in their innovative book on business models for museums, suggest developing the museum beyond an outdated model of static and rarely changing experiences and instead create an individualized experience that supports a symbiotic relationship between visitor, museum, and community. If technology is used correctly, the museum—visitor dialogue will improve and a more harmonious visiting experience will result. The implementation of new technologies can only aid the typical museum as it seeks to create a new visitor focused identity by harnessing the momentum and excitement of living in a digital age.

**Conclusion**

The desire to create well-written, visitor-centric labels is becoming a common goal of museum professionals. Many museum scholars and professionals recognize the direct connection between labels and visitor satisfaction and retention. No longer are visitors viewed as passive museumgoers, but as active and necessary participants in the
museum community. Embracing alternate and novel approaches to label writing will encourage a continuing dialog beyond the museum’s walls and perhaps even lead to greater visitor satisfaction.

However, labels are more than plain text on a white panel or the sum of their words. As purveyors of communication between the museum and the visitor, it is necessary to create labels that challenge the archetypal museum model. The use of technology—such as a museum-created smart phone application or a tablet—will stimulate intellectual curiosity and encourage visitation from a variety of audiences and learners. Its importance to the future of museums cannot be taken lightly. Museums must compete with other entertainment options for visitors’ leisure time as well as be relevant to a 21st century audience.

The archetypal label, one of poor communication and minimal emphasis on visitor wants and needs, is becoming a remnant of the past. Labels may be just one aspect of an overall exhibition. But they represent the very foundation of communication between visitor and the object. As long as there are artifacts and works of art to support, the exhibition label will have an integral role in the museum setting, drawing visitors of all ages and backgrounds into a fascinating and ever changing world, past present and future.

Darwin at the Museum Temporary Exhibit, Sam Noble Museum

---

**References**


Warrior Spirits, Temporary Exhibit, Sam Noble Museum

Dancers and Deities, Kachina Temporary Exhibit, Sam Noble Museum
Book Review:
Culture, Identity and Education


Dace Demir
Adjunct Assistant Professor of Museum Studies, College of Liberal Studies, University of Oklahoma (ddemir@ou.edu)

Early historical development of a truly public museum, particularly in Europe and the British Isles, during the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century indisputably proves that museums can be viewed as legitimate “makers of histories and identities. Looking at these together is in many ways inevitable as they are so intimately entangled. Museums are bound up with collectivities of various kinds—‘the public,’ ‘the nation,’ ‘the
community’—and these are usually realized at least in part via projections into the past” (MacDonald 2006: 112). Advancement of nationalism during the 19th century in Europe paved the way for the modern nation state, creating massive social and cultural changes. Consequently, a museum-building boom during the mid and late 19th century marked an incremental widening of public access to these cultural institutions and also placed the museum among one of the defining institutions of the state (Giebelhausen 2006, Kindle Location 662). As Giebelhausen notes, the museum “joined a range of new building types such as the railway station and the department store, which are more commonly regarded as typical markers of urban modernity” (2006, Kindle Location 666). In this regard, the Louvre should be viewed as a prototypical public museum that established and “first offered the civic ritual that other nations would [later] emulate” (Duncan 1995: 21). Also with the Louvre, the museum as an institution became highly politicized. To a certain extent, it was an important ideological messenger of the modern nation state and “proved to be a [very successful] producer of potent symbolic meanings” (Duncan 1995: 24).

The 19th century was a period marked by impressive development of royal and state museums that were modeled after the Louvre (Abt 2006: 129; Giebelhausen 2006, Kindle Location 663): the Galleria dell’Accademia (1807), Venice; the Rijksmuseum (1808), Amsterdam; the Pinacoteca di Brera (1809), Milan; the Museo del Prado (1819), Madrid; Royal Museum (1830), Berlin; Glyptothek (1830) and Alte Pinakothek (1836), Munich; National Gallery (1838), British Museum (1847), London; the New Hermitage (1851), St Petersburg; Picture Gallery (1855), Dresden; National Museum (1866), Stockholm; Kunsthistorisches Museum (1889), Vienna to name a few. As Dunkan notes, “in the years between the founding of the Louvre in 1793 and the fall of Napoleon in 1815, almost every leading European state acquired a national art museum” (1995: 37). Along with the symbolic legitimization of the nation state, the museum was also viewed as an important instrument of social change and education “capable of strengthening the social order” (Duncan 1995: 43). The Committee that was in charge of the management of the National Gallery in London strongly believed that “the very sight of art could improve the morals and deportment of even the lowest social ranks” (Duncan 1995: 43).

Between 1870 and 1900, the US also experienced a museum development boom (Wallach 1989: 23-25); however, in contrast to the nation building and nationalistic sentiments of the European counterparts, this development for the most part was driven by private initiative of urban elites and accumulation of wealth by the great magnates of the Gilded Age (DiMaggio 1991: 380-392; Wallach 1989: 25). In 1909, Richard Rathbun, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, wrote “the cultivation of art, even if in directions promising practical benefits to the people, has never received encouragement from the national Government …” (1909: 10). As argued by Wallach, the Smithsonian in this regard can be viewed as “…an exception, an anomaly precipitated upon a federal government torn by sectional rivalries and notable for its general absence from cultural affairs” (Wallach 1998: 23).

National Gallery of Ireland, has undertaken an ambitious challenge to narrate “the story of Irish museums from late eighteenth to the twenty-first century . . . and to examine the public role and social impact of the institutions within that context” (2011: x xv). This colossal and well-designed volume of 562 pages, including a good amount of high quality color and black and white photographs of art works, artifacts, architectural plans, exhibition views, buildings, early museum professionals, connoisseurs, and collectors, can certainly claim to be “the first substantial account of the history, framework, and chronological development of Irish museums and galleries” (Bourke 2011: xxx i) throughout the four definitive centuries in Irish museum history.

Fourteen diverse chapters of the book share underlying themes that are arranged into five main parts—each designated to a specific historical time period. The first part includes one chapter and is dedicated to the history of the public museum. In this part, the author provides a synoptic overview of principal events in the history of museum development, starting the discussion with the ancient origins of museums and ending it with the description of the modern public museum that emerged after the events of the French Revolution. The next four parts are dedicated to four consecutive centuries, starting from the 18th century and concluding with the twenty-first. The chapters presented in this particular section form the content core of the book, in which the author has provided very extensive research and a detailed discussion of the first museum professionals, connoisseurs, organizations, schools, expositions, collections, and, finally, government policies that were critical in the historical development of the Irish museum.

As mentioned, in the early museum development as a public institution, the “national” component was important (especially in Europe) and “we associate the emergence of the museum with the French Revolution” (Hoffmann 1994: 3). In this context, therefore, I should specify that Bourke unfolds the narrative of the “Irish museum” primarily through the prism of historical development of two major national museums in Dublin, the National Gallery of Ireland (NGI) (1864) and the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) (1890), respectively. The author argues that museums as public institutions have played an important part within the emerging political structure of the modern state, acquiring a formative role in the shaping of the nation (2011: 105). For her, the developmental trends of major national museums, as discussed in the cases of the NMI and the NGI, reveal an important part of the historical analysis of the nation. Bourke even designates Ireland as “an important case study because its profile conveys the distinct textures of a particular ‘national’ instance . . . . While the worldwide development of museums shows that they are bound up with national identity and the creation of the nation-state, the interesting situation in Ireland is that most of the major museums were established prior to the foundation of the state” (2011: xxxi). Traditionally, when viewed together with the complex sociopolitical processes of nation building during the 19th century, museums, along with other social institutions of the modern state, symbolically legitimize, reinforce, and reflect the idea of a nation. In the case of Ireland, the museum played an important part in articulating and nurturing the spirit of nationhood and a growing sense of Irish identity. As Bourke puts it, “the growth of museums formed part of the mechanism for advancing the nation but also became an embodiment of the nation” (2011: 30).
In her book, Bourke provides a detailed historical account of a very wide network of institutions and agents that were crucial in fostering the field of museology, developing the museum infrastructure in Ireland, and, finally, making the two national museums a reality. Due to the author’s specific focus on the NGI and the NMI, the book, however, is not claiming to be comprehensive and that probably was not the goal of the author. It is somewhat disturbing that out of the 442 pages, Bourke devotes only five to tell the story of the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) a museum that did not have an easy journey until the museum project finally came to fruition in 1991. The story of IMMA could have provided the reader with a new perspective on the trends that are currently taking place in the field of cultural production of Ireland, particularly in relation to the field of museology—it could have opened a new page in the history of the Irish museum. Thus, within this significant and immense historical narrative about national museums, the story that is devoted to IMMA appears quite marginal.

The very rich historical description that Bourke provides when dealing with a wide variety of collections, including paintings, drawings and sculpture; anatomical, zoological and biological
specimens; archaeological and geological material; antiquarian artifacts, as well as institutions and personalia is the most inspiring and riveting part of the volume. The book includes a great amount of historical facts and data, which, in some instances, are repeated in different parts of the book. The repetitions and the great attention to detail in some parts of the text may cause a lack of clarity and therefore confuse the reader. The author is definitely an expert in the field, especially in educational policies of museums, and her depiction of the subject matter is overarching.

At the very opening of the book, Bourke states that “the aim [of this opus] is to chart the story of Irish museum from the late eighteenth to the twenty-first century and to contextualize that story within an international framework, thereby opening up the narrative and encouraging further research and scholarship” (2011: xxv). The international perspective provides the reader with a significant comparative context, and this is a positive feature that adds another dimension to the book. The author had included the US and Great Britain as her cross-cultural references in order to show how museum models in those countries have influenced the museological trends in Ireland. This part of the book touches upon fundamental policy questions that are closely tied with the general workings of a museum and understanding of differences in historical context, tradition, and motivation of state cultural patronage are essential when distinguishing among various kinds of cross-national cultural policies. When talking about the museum in the US, Bourke sets out with a quote of Laurence Vail Coleman, one of the first influential directors of the American Alliance of Museums, stating that from the onset, the concept of the American museum was “neither an abandoned European palace nor a solution for storing national wealth… it is an American phenomenon developed by the people, for the people, and of the people” (1927: 268). The author has used the quote at least twice in her book. Early on in her text, Bourke also adds: “dependency on public funding would become a factor in the everyday life of America’s museum” (2011: 23). Both are valid arguments; however, in this comparative context, they require further critical insight and support, which are missing from the book. Major sociopolitical and historical differences are not discussed and they are crucial when using the American museum model as a major case for comparison. In this regard, the historical makeup of the country is important. In Europe, the field of cultural production, to a considerable degree, was historically determined because of the long tradition of direct patronage by royalty and rulers. Later, with advancement of modern nation states and étatisme the responsibility to support and to deliver equal access to culture was assumed, to some degree, by most governments in Europe.

In contrast to many European countries where the idea of étatisme is historically strong, in the US, “the feudal-aristocratic legacy was not only absent, but antagonistic to the expectations of many European colonists who sought to escape the oppressive courts of Europe. Coupled with the general resentment of strong government intervention in societal affairs, there was little common ground in the United States for the provision of public support for the arts until the middle of the twentieth century” (Zimmer and Toepfer 1996: 167). According to Esping-Andersen and Korpi (1984), it is possible to distinguish (among) three different models of the welfare state, e.g. the liberal, conservative, and social-democratic. As a consequence, Ireland and the US represent two different patterns of government assistance in the field of cultural production. The historical legacy of liberal principles in the United States (Esping-Andersen 1990: 69), determines that “the
provision as well as the financing of the arts [are] primarily private tasks” (Zimmer and Toepler 1996: 174). Governments are and historically have been the major sources of arts funding in most of Europe (including Ireland), representing the principles of the conservative welfare model, in which “…the direct provision as well as the subsidization of private artistic and cultural services [are] considered legitimate tasks of the public sector” (Zimmer and Toepler 1996: 174).

Bourke praises the fact that the museums in the US advanced the educational aspect of the museum: “the drive to educate, entertain, and inform became the hallmark of the American museum…” (2011: 123). In this regard, the beginning of the 20th century can be viewed as an important benchmark in the history of museum education in the US. John Dewey’s functional psychology and his works like “Democracy and Education” (1919) and “Art as Experience” (1934) promoted the new movement in pedagogy, significantly influencing also the educational role of the museum. More and more museum educators and curators in the US started to embrace his teachings in which the actual experience throughout the museum visit was considered to be more important in learning than only looking at the exhibitions.

This “drive to educate, entertain, and inform”, as Bourke argues, cannot, however, be applied this easily and successfully to the American museum prior the beginning of the new century and private ownership plays a significant part here. A closer historical and sociopolitical analysis of facts that determined cultural production, including the development of museums in 19th century America, reveals that the story of the American museum was more complex. Was it really a museum, as Coleman called it, “developed by the people, for the people, and of the people” (1927, p. 268)? The influence of the early cultural capitalists and cultural Brahmins defined the cultural production in America during the second half of the 19th century. DiMaggio argues that “the distinction between high and popular culture, in its American version, emerged in the period between 1850 and 1900 out of the efforts of urban elites to build organizational forms [including museums] that, first isolated high culture and, second, differentiated it from popular culture” (1991: 374). It was also hard to talk about a quality museum education. Outreach efforts were mostly characterized by an entertainment component—the art mixed with amusement and culture mixed with commerce: “the market declassifies culture: presenters of cultural events mixed genres and crossed boundaries to reach out to larger audiences. The Boston Museum… mixed fine art and sideshow oddities… For profit galleries exhibited art as spectacle…” (DiMaggio 1991: 378).

Despite the absence of the feudal-aristocratic legacy, in the US the upper classes or “dominant status groups” (DiMaggio 1991, 381) in the course of time also established their own art forms and institutions that supported them. Consequently, the history of the museums (particularly art museums) in the US “in the nineteenth century was… intertwined with the peculiar histories of urban elites… and their efforts to achieve cultural hegemony…” (Wallach 1998, 25) and monopolization of culture. This demonstrates that there might not be such a radical difference between the American and European counterparts after all when it comes to such questions as community engagement and education, especially before the 20th century.

Finally, Bourke’s observations effectively reveal the complexity of the policy-rhetoric that was involved in the early formation, as
well as post-independence developments, of the national museums. The Irish Free State was established in 1922 and the existence of national collections was officially recognized as vital in “marking the arrival of nationhood and celebrating its heritage” (Bourke 2011: 330). However, the future government policy regarding the national museums was not this promising and its rhetoric can be compared to that of an odd oxymoron. The unusual quotation from the Senate discussions clearly demonstrates the sentiments of many museum professionals 53 years after independence: “it reflects poorly on us as a nation that our National Collections, which are a priceless cultural asset, fared far better at the hands of the former alien governments” (Seanad Debates 1975). According to Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe, a web-based information and monitoring system of national cultural policies in Europe, “during the first thirty years of its existence the Irish state did not establish any formal instrument for cultural policy development…the arts were seen as a luxury, which the new state could not afford. Thus the story of this period is one of official neglect.” Bourke argues that one of the major reasons for this neglect was shortsighted legislation that was enacted in 1924 bringing the museums under the auspices of the Department of Education: “…within the Department of Education the cultural institutions were competing unsuccessfully with schools, colleges and other bodies for resources…” (2011:343). It was shortsighted but long lasting and the change happened only in 1993 with the establishment of the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht. As the author points out, “when the cultural institutions were placed under their own Department of Arts with a minister to argue their case at cabinet, it marked a phase of fresh new growth and development for Irish museums” (2011: 433).

The book has some flaws regarding the overall organization of the narrative and the editorial work. The name of the famous German art historian and archaeologist, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, is misspelled in three places, including the index. His surname appears as Wincklemann in the text. The book includes a good number of high quality color and black and white photographs of art works, artifacts, architectural plans, exhibition views, buildings, early museum professionals, connoisseurs, and collectors. My criticism in this regard is that they are not well integrated within the overall content of the book, but rather stand apart from the text—they are more decorative than contextual.

All in all, it matters little if one is a professional in Irish museum studies and cultural policy or not – the reader will learn a lot about Irish museums from this book. It is an important contribution to the field and without doubt will serve as a good reference for future research and scholarship on European museums.

Fig. 1. National Museum of Ireland. Photo by Mike Peel, www.mikepeel.net [http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/], via Wikimedia Commons
References


Notes

i Here I refer to museum development across Europe and the British Isles throughout the late 18th and during the 19th centuries when, due to massive political, social, and cultural changes, it is possible to start referring to the museum as a truly public institution.

ii During the beginning of the 19th century, Italy and Germany were not unified as nation states – thus the term “nation state” cannot be applied.

iii A select committee of the House of Commons.

iv Ireland became a part of United Kingdom in 1800 and until 1919 the country was ruled directly by a united parliament at Westminster.
in London.

According to Pierre Bourdeau, the field of cultural production is understood as a system of objective relations between the agents or institutions (e.g. Ministry of Culture, museums, galleries, art schools, academy, dealers, publishers, critics, etc.) and as the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated.

E.g. France, Germany, Sweden, Great Britain.

The term coined by Paul DiMaggio.

(Right) Fig. 2. Ireland, the Emerald Isle. Photo author Jeff Schmaltz, NASA Earth Observatory. Wikimedia Commons
Book Review:

Jeffrey Hill, Kevin Moore, and Jason Wood, eds. 2012. Boydell Press, Woodbridge, UK. $95 US.

Katrina Menard
Assistant Curator of Invertebrates, Sam Noble Museum, University of Oklahoma
(kmenard@ou.edu)

Sport, History and Heritage: Studies in Public Representation is an ambitious work that covers all aspects of sport heritage and history being studied and disseminated in modern society, with a focus on Great Britain. The volume is part of the Heritage Matters Series (P. G. Stone, P. Davis, and C. Whitehead, eds.), whose goal is to address “the whole range of issues that confront the cultural heritage sector as we face the global challenges of the twenty-first century.” With 17 chapters devoted to every conceivable angle relating to the topic of heritage and sport history, the volume certainly confronts the challenge of this relatively new genre of history. Being published just before the 2012 London Olympics, it is also a timely and novel review about how sports can impact a country’s global image.

The introduction and the first six chapters focus on the definition of sports heritage and its emergence as a topic of rigorous academic study in the past 30 years. There are several case studies of the history of and representation of rugby, cricket, football [American soccer], and boxing in British culture. The introduction and first chapter attempt to separate the concepts of history versus heritage, the latter which does not have a codified definition among historians and whose meaning indeed varies from chapter to chapter in this book. Chapters two and three focus on the challenges of broaching factual realities of sports history versus the perpetuated and idealized versions of sports such as rugby and cricket. A central theme for these chapters is also social class: who decides what is heritage and what is not, and how to cater to audiences and fans of all classes. Chapter four looks into whether heritage in football, which is often considered a middle class sport, could be translated into a fine arts competition, which is typically associated with the upper class for example. Boxing, the focus of chapter five was investigated for its ability to transcend multiple classes while retaining its East End roots. Chapter six focuses on the effects of televised sports, particularly the 1948 Olympics in London, on British sports history across multiple demographics of society. By focusing on how sports heritage is established and by whom, this section highlights the complexities of its preservation and representation, particularly when there are conflicting perspectives.

The second section of the volume focuses on sports museums. First, by presenting an overview of the history of sports museums, followed by five case studies of specific museums in Europe. Sports museums in Europe, particularly Great Britain, are relatively new compared to the long histories of their respective sports. How each
museum has dealt with presenting sports history, if a physical dedicated museum space is needed, whether internet and online archives are or will be surpassing direct usage of artifacts by the audience, the politics of who owns and decides what is displayed, and the physical organization and aesthetics of presenting a sports-based exhibition are discussed.

Chapter eight, which covers the acquisition of the Everton Collection (football club memorabilia), focuses on the different ways a single collection can be maximized to benefit students through outreach and education, visitors through exhibitions, and online visitors and scholars through online digital archives of the artifacts and documents. Chapter nine takes a completely different perspective with the Spanish Alavés Football Museum by discussing how outside international influences, such as the foreign ownership of the team, can completely derail a local team’s sports museum. Once a museum space is established, how to keep the content relevant and interesting is the focus of chapter 10 with the British Golf Museum. Relocating a museum to a new space when it has a long history and tradition of its own in a particular location also has pros and cons, which the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum has dealt with, and which is discussed in the last chapter of this section.

The last section of the book covers the heritage of sporting sights and venues themselves, through memories, memorials, and recorded history. Because most sports have stadiums, courses, rings, and other physical structures built for players and fans of sports and are where most of the “action” occurs, memories and heritage will always be associated with them even if they are not officially designated as “museums”. This is highlighted in the section’s introductory chapter (12). How these structures retain their history through modernization changes in ownership, and expansion is the focus of chapter 13, which looks at Anfield field in Liverpool and the challenges they have met by relocating to a larger stadium. One of the major influences with Anfield field’s changes is the effect on and connection to the local community associated with the stadium. This theme is continued in chapter 14, which looks at how memories are tied to stadiums by the community and fans through memorials attributed to certain players or events, naming of stands, and other ways of linking the history to the physical space of the sport. How stadiums, sports teams, and their associated heritage can be agents of cultural and political change is discussed in chapter fifteen by looking at the Gaelic Athletic Association and its changing role in Ireland’s history. The largest and most broadly recognized type of stadium, the Olympic stadium, is analyzed in chapter 16 for its influence in representing the Olympics and the host city. The only non-European museum and venue studied is the Indianapolis 500 track, which is studied from a non-racecar fan’s perspective in chapter 17. The author of that chapter discusses how sports stadiums, venues and museums can better serve broader audiences beyond those directly affiliated or interested in the sport highlighted.

Sports heritage is a very broad and encompassing
topic, and the book as a whole reflects this with the range of topics and focus in each of the chapters. However, precisely because the topic is so broad, the volume as a whole lacks a sense of continuity. For example, in the second section of using museums as venues of sports heritage, the chapters skip around from first-hand accounts of actually creating and implementing sports heritage to outside perspectives and opinion pieces of existing museums. The first chapter of the Museums and the Representation of Sports section is a first-hand account about acquiring the Everton football collection and the step-by-step processes they took in creating a physical and online presence that highlights the collection. The second chapter of the section touches on artifacts, but mainly covers the scandalous local and international politics of creating the Alavés museum from an outside perspective. The third chapter is more of an opinion piece about the golf museum and the pros and cons of the museum and its exhibits, again from an outside perspective. The last chapter of the section then goes back again to a first-hand account of what the Wimbledon museum did with layouts, revamping of space, and the nitty-gritty of museum exhibition development. While it is true that sports heritage and its representation should take into account all of these factors, a reader looking for specific information, such as how to best create a temporary exhibition to highlight a museum’s sports artifacts, will have to wade through the entire book.

This volume takes an important first step by compiling all of this relevant information about public representation of sports history, but it is apparent that each chapter could easily be its own volume of research, and will likely be so in the future. I recommend this book as a valuable first step for the field, and an important read for anyone looking to cover sport heritage in their community or museum.

Fig. 2. The National Horseracing Museum, Newmarket, UK. Photo by Tony Lewis, via Wikimedia Creative Commons


Lindsay Maass
Graduate Student, Biological Anthropology, Department of Anthropology and Sam Noble Museum, University of Oklahoma (lindsay.j.maass@ou.edu)

“Human remains are not just another artifact; they have potency, they are charged with political, evidentiary, and emotional meanings but can also be quite mundane, such as classroom anatomical study collections. Where once [...] considered standard materials for museums to curate and the ‘property’ of lone curators and researchers, they are now numerous voices to be heard and considered on the subject. The acts of collecting and studying human remains have
become political and socially more complex, and new unwritten rules of order are slowly developing into standard practice." (Cassman et al., 2007, p. 1)

The introductory chapter of Curating Human Remains: Caring for the Dead in the United Kingdom provides the background information that led to the events and collaboration for writing the book. After the background section, the structure of the book is set up and summarized in 14 chapters, either as individual chapters, or with several chapters grouped together if they had similar topics. The collaboration of the book was a result of a 2009 symposium of a Theoretical Archaeology Group Conference held in Durham, England, which brought to light many important but poorly considered issues regarding the care of human remains. Since, “archaeologists, museum practitioners, government agencies, claimants and the public often disagree over the subject of human remains” (Walker, 2008), it was obvious that a more practical context was needed for the care of human remains in United Kingdom collections.

Conflicting positions exist about how to care for, store, display and interpret human remains, along with debates about ownership that “place the subject into the political, cultural and legal arenas” (Cassman et al., 2007). Some key issues faced by curators of human remains are discussed in the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums (Lammy et al., 2005), which are used for institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that hold human remains in permanent collections; and the Guidelines for the Care of Human Remains in Scottish Museum Collections (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2011) is a similar document for Scottish institutions. Both documents are valuable guideline references that will assist in creating standardizing practices for the United Kingdom.

An international perspective on human remains is provided in Chapter 1, with a focus on how “human remains arrive in repositories and what variables influence their care once they become a collection” (Giesen, 2013: 8). “[M]ajor events and influences that have affected the excavation, display, study and ownership of human remains in the last 30 years from a United Kingdom perspective” (Giesen, 2013: 8) is presented in Chapter 2. Also included is a brief account of key events related to legislation, the published guidance documents pertaining to human remains, and some of the possible motives behind the social, cultural and political forces that become involved during debates about human remains, incorporating the best opinions on how to move forward for those involved.

Legal and regulatory aspects of curating human remains, along with ethical obligations of the caretakers of human remains in universities and museums in England, are covered in chapters 3 and 4. Also included are the most recent estimates for the number of human remains held in English museums, which were tabulated from an institutional survey. In Chapter 5, the authors discuss issues surrounding the availability of documents associated with human remains. They consider the types of documents and share two case studies emphasizing the challenges of accessing human remains collections when limited records are made public and the records available are incomplete. An overview of Scottish museums and initial reactions to the Guidelines are given in Chapters 6 and 7. Several sections of the Guidelines and Scottish laws were met with apprehension or confusion since they pertained to archaeological, medical and ethnographical human remains and certain clauses were very specific about the public
display of items, repatriation and terminology that was permitted. One major issue was that the legal aspects of human remains collections were unclear in Scotland since the Guidelines pertained specifically to England, Wales and Northern Ireland collections. In chapter 7, a case study presenting the Perth Museum and Art Gallery stresses issues related to acquisition, research, collection management, and display of human remains.

The focus of the book centers on England in chapters 8-10 and considers the various types of curation facilities “in terms of organizational framework, scope of collections and creative reuse of structures” (Giesen, 2013: 8). Chapter 8 looks at the Museum of London and its holdings of over 17,000 individuals excavated from the City and Greater London area, dating from the Neolithic period to the Victorian era. Attention is drawn to the Museum of London’s policies and practices, focusing on the acquisition, reburial, display, educational and learning use, and recording standards of the human remains. Chapter 9 summarizes how human remains are managed at the Great North Museum: Hancock, which holds a smaller collection of human remains, but the unique collection ranges from partial or whole skeletal remains, soft tissues or organs, skin, slide preparations of human tissue, and artworks composed of human bodily fluids or soft tissue.

Chapter 10 looks at a policy initiative by English Heritage and the Church of England that discuss the use of redundant churches for both storage and research, which can be a cost effective way of storing the human remains if the main fabric of the building only needs minimal modifications. It presents and evaluates St. Peter’s Church, Barton-upon-Humber, which is an example of such practice and “explores the prospects of retaining collections at other churches in England” (Giesen, 2013: 8). Chapter 11 considers curation of human remains specific to teaching and research outside of a museum context, and provides an overview of current lab protocols at Durham University Fenwick Human Osteology Lab. It strongly advocates the need of curation standards and relevant policies to be in place so human remains in labs are utilized to the highest standard for teaching and research. The author, Charlotte Roberts, drew on her experience of setting up and managing labs at both Durham and Bradford Universities.

The issue of short-term curation for archaeology contractors is addressed in chapter 12. Certain field units are typically expected to hold both human remains and other artifacts up to many years after analysis and publication of the findings are complete. This short-term turned long-term storage is a result of ongoing negotiations between excavators of the material and museum personnel. An additional factor is finding collection space since many museum storage areas are reaching their capacity. This is especially the case for human remains, which tend to require more storage space and additional administrative considerations.

Chapter 13 focuses on legislation, highlighting the laws affecting burial archaeology and the “events surrounding the recent changes in burial legislation” (Giesen, 2013: 9). One change includes advice and consultation from the Ministry of Justice to help resolve issues that were previously unclear. In previous times the funding for ‘rescue’ or ‘salvage’ archaeology came from local and central government. Space funding has now moved to commercial archaeologists, who have greatly contributed to the number of recorded sites in the last two decades. The chapter discusses how both historic and ancient human remains can be studied and curated in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but it is agreed upon that the new process is confusing and overly complex.
The final chapter (14) summarizes the ideas included in the previous chapters, drawing on the author’s own experiences, and incorporating some overarching conclusions about human remains in United Kingdom collections. Also summarized are “the key considerations required to safeguard and appropriately acknowledge the importance of human remains in collections” (Giesen, 2013: 9).

Overall, the book is well written and provides great details about the topics covered. In all collections that hold human remains, similar issues arise and policies, protocols, laws, ethics, and standards are not as clear as they may appear to be at first glance. Many times, professionals require a collaborative effort to make sure they are all on the same page in regards to the care and curation of human remains, which is what this book is advocating for with the human remains collections in the United Kingdom. Most human remains may appear as a case-by-case situation and these guidelines are a way to properly handle the entire process of excavation, ownership, transfer of material, curation, documentation, storage, research, and potential reburial. It is important to be caretakers for human remains so that the wealth of knowledge they possess can be preserved and utilized for generations to come.

References


(Right) Fig. 1. Giant spider at Sam Noble Museum. Photo by Sam Noble Museum Staff