



CultureWork

A Periodic Broadside* for Arts
and Culture Workers

November, 1997. Vol. 1, No. 3.

Institute for Community Arts Studies

Arts & Administration Program, University of Oregon

In this issue:

- The Invisible Careers for Latinos: Public History and Museum Studies. Miguel Juarez
- A Call for Manuscript Proposals: Making Invisible Histories of Art Education Visible.
- Announcement of a New Journal: Theatre Management Journal.

The Invisible Careers for Latinos: Public History and Museum Studies

by Miguel Juarez

THis article is both a discussion of public history and an exploration into the lack of Latinos in museums and humanities positions where culture and identity are collected and presented. Public history and museum studies make up a list of invisible careers for Latinos and people of color. While this is less true now than a few years ago, the number of people of color in both fields is still

alarmingly low. At the same time, the exploration into the linkages between public history and museum studies is an attempt to demystify and take certain lingo from contemporary culture out of these vocations. This article also calls for the need to examine the role of the independent scholars and curators in the process of presenting culture and history.

First and foremost, it is essential and imperative for us, as peoples of color, to begin to research, collect, and write the histories of our own. If we wait for academe and institutions to do it, the wait may be forever. Scholarship of our communities shouldn't necessarily come from academe. We must not wait for institutions to affirm our history as important and worth collecting, processing, preserving, and presenting. Why should we wait for outsiders to come into our communities, when we, as insiders, can do the work? When we take responsibility for the presentation and celebration of our culture, it becomes an act of empowerment.

Writing history and presenting components of our cultures from within the community has always been and will continue to be a challenge. This type of interpretation of facts and common experiences has always been contested by academe because it falls outside the parameters of traditional history and curatorial training. This form of writing and presenting history and culture is most often referred to as "applied history," or, in contemporary lingo, as "public history." The counterparts for untrained presenters and exhibitors of culture are "independent curators," and free agents of cultural criticism are "cultural writers" or "free-lancers."

Where there is a surplus of traditionally trained historians, there is an absence of formally trained public historians, curators, and art critics of color. A slight percentage of these specialists are Latino, and these comprise one of the fastest growing segments of society. The study of public history is one of those gray areas in the humanities, such as arts administration, museum studies, and arts criticism, which still remain beyond reach for large numbers of people of color.

These areas are typically *process vocations*. Most of the people of color who do discover these areas usually get there after a series of processes, periods of personal growth, or work in these areas which takes them there. When they do make it through the process and enroll in advanced degree programs, people of color often lack certain coursework and remedial classes are required. If the remedial classes don't kill you, xenophobia or the lack of fellow students and sometimes faculty's familiarity with one's culture may. So, if one enrolls in graduate work for these invisible careers, not only is one subjected to academic catch-up but surrounded by persons who are limited to their exposure of other cultures. Unfortunately, people of color are perennially judged on stereotypes which abound in media.

After having been involved in organizing cultural events over a ten year period, I enrolled in graduate studies in arts management in Southern California. I was the only Latino in the program. I often felt misunderstood. I sought to intern with Chicano cultural institutions in Southern California such as Plaza de la Raza, and Self-Help Graphics in East L.A. I was discouraged by the program from working with these groups because they didn't represent ideal models for non-profits. Chicano organizations mirror Chicano families, society and church culture and they've operated in similar modes because those have been the available historical models.

The program advisor wanted me to experience working in "accepted arts management structures" (if there had been such a thing). As a result, my participation in certain minority organizations was out of the question. Judgments of race and ethnicity also extended to visiting lecturers. One speaker once told me that I was destined to be an asset to "my people." I had hoped she meant my people were the human race and not necessarily Latinos.

It's not always the case, but typically people of color usually experience the field first, then get the credentials and go on to work further in the field. Our counterparts tend to do it differently. They first get the degrees and then work in their areas. In theory, it may be easier to first get academically prepared, then work in the field versus working in the field, then going back to school. But people of color, older adults, and especially women must do both, at the same time managing multiple priorities (such as family, who may not necessarily be supportive because these careers are simply beyond their own field of experience).

Recently, in a discussion on the lack of people of color in museums on MUSEUM-L (the Museum Discussion List), one museum administrator noted that careers in the humanities and museum careers are often viewed, due to their low pay and high educational requirements, as "luxury" careers. This administrator said she read in an essay from an African American student that her guidance counselors pushed her towards a career in business rather than anthropology because she would be better able to get a good job. She pursued a business degree, got a job, and was unhappy. She returned to school and is now earning a degree in anthropology. I think that her counselor meant well, but was misguided. There may be a similar situation with Latino students.

On the subject of Latinos in museums and careers in museums, another museum professional in New York City, wrote:

I think part of the problem of under representation is that museums (as a whole) are not very accessible to Latinos. Therefore, many

[Latinos] do not even visit museums, let alone consider them as a potential employer. There is also the issue of inferiority among Latinos (not so with the newer generations--Thank God !!) who feel "Oh I could never get to a level like that" ---and settle for museum security positions. Lastly, when I lived in DC I attended a three day career conference for Latinos, not one arts institution was represented, nor were they invited. When I spoke to the conference organizer about this she said---most people are interested in getting into the business world--I told her that use of a limited vision like that is what holds us back.

The key ingredient driving these invisible careers is service, not necessarily money. One hopes to make a personal contribution. Aside from serving on boards, we don't see many high powered white collar individuals leave their lucrative vocations to settle for a position as an arts manager, curator, education curator, etc.

Another professional in a small museum in the Southwest remarked that:

Schools can be blamed for not encouraging students from varied backgrounds to consider work in the less common arts, science and humanities jobs. But our office manager, who is a Chicana, also believes that the cultural climate in many Hispanic homes and communities is not one that highly esteems, or even recognizes, museums as important. Does it matter if kids can tell frogs from toads, a Whistler from a Warhol, or the Mexican Revolution from the Mexican War, if their friends are pregnant and dropping out of high school, struggling to get by working at fast-food jobs, or simply more interested in watching major league sports on TV?

I differ with these comments. Those of us working in these fields share the responsibility for recruiting Latinos and other people of color to our ranks. But in reality, we have to compete with the high Latino and Black drop-out rate, teen pregnancies, and the lack of economic mobility in our communities--again, it's dependent on personal life choices in the process of personal growth.

After organizing art exhibits and projects on a grass-roots level and taking graduate course work in arts management and several classes in museum studies, it wasn't until I devoted several years to writing a book, attended oral history conferences and met individuals studying public history that I came upon these fields, where people of color are underrepresented. In retrospect, I realize, I've been practicing public history (oral history, history publishing, research, organizing cultural exhibits, writing interpretative materials, producing videos) all along, but no one

around me, or even I, for that matter, recognized it for what it was--public history, which can fit comfortably within the activities associated with museums.

Yet, because I've lacked the "necessary credentials," my curatorial/interpretative competence has been perennially judged against the glow of higher education. Lacking an advanced degree in curatorial studies didn't stop me from organizing and curating art exhibits and engaging in a myriad of activities I can now count as experience, but it did increase public scrutiny of my role as an independent curator/researcher.

I've been on the road to working in museums for over a decade. And now the need for cultural collection, processing, presentation, and interpretation has led me on a path towards pursuing advanced studies. My personal process and development has led me here. It has been a process of making connections, staying true to my strengths and skills, keeping an open mind, learning and growing, and staying on a path less traveled by the majority of people in my culture group. And I am grateful to continue on my journey.

Miguel "Mike" Juarez is a cultural arts historian and native El Pasoan. He received a B.A. degree in journalism from the University of Texas at El Paso in 1985 and took graduate studies in Arts Administration and Chicano Research Studies at California State University at Dominguez Hills and Museum Studies at California State University at Long Beach. With fellow artist Paul H. Ramirez, he organized Juntos 1985, 1st Hispanic Art Exhibition, which led to the formation of the Juntos Art Association. He has coordinated dozens of community art exhibits and readings. From 1986 to 1989, he served on the Texas Regional Steering Committee for *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-85*, (CARA) exhibit.

His poetry, prose, feature articles, book and theater reviews, art work and photography have appeared in numerous publications in Texas and California. Juarez has taught art history at the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) in Ciudad Juarez as a visiting scholar through the El Paso Community College International Studies Program. Juarez is a member of the Southwest Oral History Association (SOHA) and a member of the Multiculturality Committee of the national Oral History Association (OHA). He is currently a graduate student in the School of Information and Library Science at the University at Buffalo. In July of this year, Juarez published his first book, *Colors on Desert Walls: the Murals of El Paso* (Texas Western Press at the University of Texas at El Paso), a bilingual book, chronicling the region's mural movement and its artists. Miguel Juarez may be reached at <mjuarez@acsu.buffalo.edu>.



Call For Manuscript Proposals

"Making Invisible Histories of Art Education Visible"

Paul Bolin, Kristin G. Congdon, Doug Blandy, Editors

PUBLISHER: The National Art Education Association

PURPOSE: To introduce art educators and other professionals concerned with art and culture to historical perspectives on art education (1930 - present) in the United States and Canada that is inclusive of stories, experiences, teaching methods, and cultural groups whose art education histories have not been fully explored and documented. Emphasis is placed on personal narratives to the greatest extent possible.

SECTIONS: This anthology will include three sections:

- Formal education settings (public and private schools, pre-school through higher education)
- Museums and community arts settings; and
- Folk group settings

KINDS OF MANUSCRIPTS: Two general types will be accepted: Research chapters of approximately 12 - 18 pages and 1 - 2 page personal testimonials about a mentor.

If you respond with a proposed research chapter, please send 3 copies of a 1 page abstract and 1 - 2 page outline. Responses to the call with a proposed testimonial, please send 3 copies of a 1 page abstract. All responses should be directed to Dr. Doug Blandy, Arts and Administration Program, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403. Postmark Deadline: May 1, 1998

SPECIAL NOTE: Please review your calendar as you consider responding to the call. The editors must adhere to the timeline that follows in order to meet the publisher's deadline.

TIMELINE: Abstracts and outlines due May 1, 1998. Authors of accepted materials must submit manuscripts by October 1, 1998. Manuscripts with suggested revisions will be sent to authors from editors by November 30, 1998. Authors return final manuscripts to editors, paper and disk copies by December 30, 1998.



Announcement of a New Journal and Call for Articles

The Theatre Management Focus Group of The Association for Theatre in Higher Education announces the creation of an electronic peer reviewed journal [THEATRE MANAGEMENT JOURNAL](http://artsnet.heinz.cmu.edu/ATHEEJ/) at the URL: [<http://artsnet.heinz.cmu.edu/ATHEEJ/>](http://artsnet.heinz.cmu.edu/ATHEEJ/).

THEATRE MANAGEMENT JOURNAL will include, articles, reviews, commentary, conference proceedings, and letters. The purpose of THEATRE MANAGEMENT JOURNAL is to enhance scholarship and research in the field of Theatre Management. Submissions are now being sought for the inaugural issue. Articles, commentary, letters, conference proceedings, and reviews can be submitted in electronic form to:

ATHEEJ@ARTSWIRE.ORG

Submissions on disk or in print form can be submitted to:

Kevin Marshall, Managing Editor
THEATRE MANAGEMENT JOURNAL
Box 870239
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
205-348-3850

All submissions should be double spaced, articles should use endnotes.

THEATRE MANAGEMENT JOURNAL server space and systems administration support is provided by the Center for Arts Management and Technology in the Master of Arts Management Program at Carnegie Mellon University.

Back Issues:

- [May, 1997. Volume 1, No. 1: A Tool for Analysis of Web Sites' Accessibility to Users with Disabilities.](#) Douglas Blandy, Ph.D.

- July, 1997. Volume 1, No. 2: The Arts Management Employment Interview. Deborah Snider.
-

CultureWork is an electronic publication of the University of Oregon Institute for Community Arts Studies. Its mission is to provide timely workplace-oriented information on culture, the arts, education, and community.

CultureWork seeks submissions of concise (500-1500 words) critiques and advisories on community arts and the preparation of community arts workers. Graphics that express the spirit of community arts are welcome, to be published with attribution. Manuscripts should be sent in plain text format, via email, or on either Macintosh or Intel high-density 3.5 inch floppies. Send submissions to Maria Finison at mfinison@darkwing.uoregon.edu or via snailmail: care of Arts & Administration Program, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon, Eugene Oregon 97403. If accepted for publication, authors may be asked to make revisions.

Opinions expressed by authors of **CultureWork** broadsides do not necessarily express those of the editors, the Institute for Community Arts Studies, or the University of Oregon.

Arts and Administration | The Institute for Community Arts Studies (I.C.A.S.)



©1997 The Institute for Community Arts Studies unless otherwise noted; all other publication rights revert to the author or artist.

Editor: Richard Bear.

Editorial Assistant: Vanessa Ward.

Advisor: Dr. Douglas Blandy.

Comments to: mfinison@darkwing.uoregon.edu

