

Young Friends: Volunteers and Patrons

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Young friends of museums who are sometimes volunteers, sometimes patrons and sometimes both, play an important role in the international museum community. Throughout the world, young adults are active volunteer contributors to the advancement and growth of museums. These individuals are involved in the conservation and preservation of cultural heritage by generously donating their time, money and effort. All the while, they are gaining important career and life experience. Generally known as “Young Friends”, they are essential to museums as eventually the institutions will pass into their stewardship.

> A great way for Young Friends to learn and gain experience is by volunteering. Traditionally, the role of a museum volunteer may have lacked diversity and autonomy. Nowadays, museums are offering a variety of positions that match the volunteer’s skills with the museum’s needs: university graduates with a passion for communication and planning increasingly apply for volunteer positions as special events/marketing interns. Participation in fundraising helps the museum and teaches organisational and promotional skills that are attractive experience on job applications.

“Young people are active members of the World Federation of Friends of Museums. Today young friends are volunteers, community outreach activists, guides, and technical support staff of new and traditional museums. Of WFFM’s two million members worldwide, more and more participants are under age 35.”

Carla Bossi-Comelli, President, WFFM

> Museums worldwide offer membership programs that provide young patrons with the opportunity to be more involved in museum activities. For a fee, these programs offer exclusive benefits including subscriptions to newsletters, invitations to openings, screenings, and other membership

activities. Benefits for young patrons not only include the traditional discounts at the museum boutique or bookshop, but also the opportunity to engage with other like-minded young adults in specially organised social events. Young Friends are attracted to museum activities geared to their own children’s growing cultural appetites.

> Many of these young patrons are called “Young Friends” such as at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (UK), or go by other names, like at the Prado, where young patrons are called the “Fundadores 2000”. In New York City, museums rival one another to attract young benefactors and potential longer term support through groups with distinct denominations such as the American Museum of Natural History’s “Junior Council”, the “Whitney Contemporaries”, the Guggenheim’s “Young Collectors Council”, MoMA’s “Junior Associates”, and the Metropolitan’s “Apollo Circle”.

Attractions include concerts, cocktails and seasonal theme dinners that include fundraising staples like silent auctions, celebrity entertainment and haute couture sponsored prizes. These events can raise more than \$100,000 in a single evening of cultural philanthropy, though the real objective is to win lifelong commitment to an institution.

(See “Cocktails for arts: Museums compete for young patrons”, by Dana Vachon, *International Herald Tribune*, Friday, January 13, 2006.)

“I have learnt to express myself, be more open and have a wider perspective on life...

I am proud to be a Museum Ambassador.

It boosted my self-confidence and esteem.

It has taught me a lot about myself and about life.”

*Young Ambassador,
Natale Labia Museum,
South Africa*

Mus’Art & GBHS Kumbo

Peter Musa, *Director, Musa Heritage Gallery - Mus’Art (Cameroon)*

Each year, the Musa Heritage Gallery (Mus’Art) based in Kumbo town in the North West Province of Cameroon, has engaged in promoting the arts and education in Cameroon’s Western Grassfields by receiving the Lower Sixth Philosophy Class of the Government Bilingual High School, GBHS Kumbo. The programme is very important to the high school students as it contributes in preparing them for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) A Level Philosophy examinations. According to their teacher, Njong Sewong Celestine, head of the Philosophy department, the annual visit helps the students to gain full mastery of the sub-section “Arts and Culture” in the examination on “Man and Nature.”

Njong revealed that the objectives of the visit to Mus’Art included specifically enabling students to acquire a set of competencies, such as: 1. Making an inquiry into different aesthetic values, both technical and scientific, and relating these to the culture of a people; 2. After identifying the various works of art, being able to appreciate them and relate them to their cultures; 3. Representing and understanding the concept of beauty, using African paradigms; 4. Evaluating culture and relating it to civilisations; 5. Identifying some of the natural and human-made dangers threatening the culture of a people; and 6. Better approaching questions on matters of Arts and Culture.

The annual visit is divided into three activities. It starts with a guided tour of the Mus’Art collection, includes a visit to the Nso’ Royal Palace and finishes up with a Question/Answer session at Mus’Art. For 2006, which happens to be 10th anniversary year for Mus’Art, the visit organised on the 1st of February for the first time included an “Interactive Education” session. For this, GBHS students worked on the topic “What is an Art Object?”... Results can be found in

the form of their original answers which have been posted on our website (see www.musartgallery.info.ms).

For two months last year (January-March 2005), Mus’Art benefited from AFRICOM’s Museum Professional Internship Programme, funded by Sida, on Developing Interactive Education Programmes and Museum Exhibitions as part of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) Interactive Public Programmes Project. This programme, thanks to AFRICOM, NMK and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), made it possible to introduce this new approach and experience it with our GBHS students this year.

Furthermore, this ongoing partnership between GBHS Kumbo and the museum is aimed at also creating awareness of the role Mus’Art plays as a contributor to the cultural education process, something which still needs to be embraced throughout the Republic of Cameroon. On the day of the visit, public awareness is created in Kumbo town - which has a population of over 100,000 - as the GBHS students walk in a group from their school to Mus’Art and to the Nso’ Palace, which is the seat of His Majesty, the Fon of Nso’ and centre of Nso’ cultural life.

Mus’Art seeks to continue to establish similar partnerships with other schools in order to get more young people fully involved in the museum. Even the youngest students can do a lot to promote awareness of the protection of artistic and cultural objects, thus helping to stop the illicit trafficking of heritage. They also get a better appreciation and understanding of what the arts are all about and what museums can do as community organisations.

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