

# ROOM

**THE LASTING  
IMPACT OF  
INTENSIVE TEEN  
PROGRAMS IN  
ART MUSEUMS**



# TO RISE



**Room to Rise: The Lasting Impact of Intensive  
Teen Programs in Art Museums**

Danielle Linzer and Mary Ellen Munley  
Editor: Ellen Hirzy

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

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Museum of Contemporary Arts Houston (bottom)

Back cover: Walker Art Center Teen Arts Council,  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (top); MOCA and  
Louis Vuitton Young Arts Program, The Museum  
of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (bottom)





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# PREFACE

## ADAM D. WEINBERG

*Having gone through the program, I've felt like the museum is home to me. Even if I've never been to a particular museum before, I just know how to be in that space.*

In her dedication of the Whitney Museum of American Art's new building on April 30, 2015, First Lady Michelle Obama shared these powerful words from a past participant of the Whitney's Youth Insights program for teens, a testament to the deep and lasting attachment to museums that was forged through that formative experience. Mrs. Obama's historic speech highlighted the perceived barriers that keep so many young people of color and from low-income neighborhoods away from our nation's cultural institutions: "There are so many kids in this country who look at places like museums and concert halls and other cultural centers and they think to themselves, well, that's not a place for me, for someone who looks like me, for someone who comes from my neighborhood." At the same time, she spoke to the power of targeted education programming to break down those barriers, actively engaging and welcoming young people from all walks of life into the museum. By doing so, these programs are fostering lifelong connections to art and culture and broadening and building diverse museum audiences for the future.

The remarks Mrs. Obama shared were gathered as part of a national research initiative launched at the Whitney nearly five years ago seeking to better understand and document the long term and continuing impacts of youth engagement and empowerment in museums.

Among our research questions we asked: How are young people changed by having access to the art, artists, and ideas of the museum? And how are museums shaped by opening themselves up to teens and giving them a voice in the institution? Through a generous National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services we were able to assemble a team of peer institutions, scholars, and expert advisors to tackle these questions with innovation, creativity, and rigor.

*Room to Rise* is the result of years of close partnership among four museums that have pioneered intensive teen programming in the context of the contemporary art environment over the last two decades. We were lucky to have truly exemplary partners in this project—the Walker Art Center, The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Their willingness to devote time, energy, intellectual resources, and their incredible staff to exploring these questions made this research exponentially more significant. As a result, this investigation has yielded findings that go beyond the anecdotal, generating a new understanding of the deep and lasting impact museums can have on their program participants and their larger communities.

We thank IMLS for strengthening our nation's museums and libraries and encouraging us to ask and answer difficult questions that have the potential to push our practice forward as a field. With their support, we provided extensive professional development opportunities for staff at each of the participating museums, building our collective capacity to conduct substantive research and evaluation. My gratitude to Claudia French, Deputy Director for Museum Services, Steven Schwartzman, Senior Museum Program Officer, Helen Wechsler, Supervisory Grants Management Specialist, and Tim Carrigan, Senior Library Program Officer, all of whom provided thoughtful guidance and assistance over the life of this project.

At the Whitney, I thank Kathryn Potts, Associate Director, Helena Rubinstein Chair of Education, for her leadership and commitment to excellence and rigor in the work of the Whitney's Education Department. My deepest appreciation to Danielle Linzer, Director of Access and Community Programs, who served as Project Director; without her tireless efforts and vision, this ambitious project would not have been possible.

This initiative was strengthened immensely by a team of talented collaborators and contributors. Research Advisor Mary Ellen Munley, Principal of MEM & Associates, expertly guided us through this process, helping to turn a group of committed educators into enthusiastic researchers. Just as teens can be changed in profound ways by the time they spend in museum programs, our staff found themselves similarly challenged and transformed by this uniquely powerful learning experience. Editor Ellen Hirzy brought her experience with museums to editing and developing additional content for this report. Our graphic designers, Virginia Chow and Hilary Greenbaum, transformed the hundreds of quotes, graphs, and stories we collected into an accessible resource for the field.

Finally, we are grateful to the alumni themselves who entered this evaluative process with such openness and honesty and shared so much about their lives. Now, as a result of this research, we see that teens from all backgrounds not only represent a dynamic and engaged audience for contemporary art and museums, but also that these experiences benefit them, and in turn, our society, in myriad, complex, lasting ways. It is our hope that these findings will illuminate the deep and transformational impacts museums can have on young lives when, in Mrs. Obama's words, "they open their doors as wide as possible, both to the artists they embrace and to the young people they seek to uplift."

Teens learn about art, themselves, and each other by working with professional artists. Here, MOCA teen program participants transport artworks created with Marnie Weber through downtown Los Angeles.







2nd St

BIKE LANE

# INTRODUCTION



In the summer of 2009, the Whitney Museum of American Art announced an open staff position with Youth Insights (YI), its education program for teens. One applicant especially captured the museum's attention. "This opportunity seems a little like fate," wrote Diane Exavier. "Youth Insights is still one of the most important things that has ever happened to me. In many ways, it was the beginning of my artistic life."

Diane's artistic life has blossomed since she was a Youth Insights participant as a high school senior in 2004–05. Now a practicing artist and playwright pursuing an MFA at Brown University, she has worked in theater and arts education. "There are obvious traces of YI all over my work," she said—from her writing and costume design to her work teaching children and teens in an arts and writing program. "I always felt so lucky and honored to be having access to all those priceless works of art, meeting and learning about artists, and being part of important intergenerational conversations." Diane joined the Youth Insights staff that summer as a program assistant, and for three years she introduced high school students to the experiences she values so deeply.

Young adults like Diane Exavier were in many ways the inspiration for this research project. Since the 1990s, intensive programs geared to adolescent audiences have sprung up in museums across the country, welcoming teens into the institution and empowering them to explore the possibilities inherent in collaborative work, peer engagement, experiences with art, and interaction with artists. Everyone who works with youth in these settings sees the clear, immediate transformative benefits. Teens whose paths might never have crossed learn to appreciate the value of difference. They are inspired and challenged by contemporary art and artists, often for the first time. They test the waters of adult responsibility, investigate career pathways, and focus on the important adolescent work of shaping personal identity. But until this study, there had been no in-depth, formal inquiry into how these experiences affect program alumni over the long term in their personal, academic, and professional lives.<sup>1</sup>

In 2011, practitioners in four art museums—with support from a National Leadership Grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services—launched a research and evaluation initiative to explore the long-term impacts of intensive teen programs in contemporary art museums. Using variations on the teen council or apprenticeship model, these programs bring diverse youth together to work collaboratively with museum staff and artists, developing vibrant activities and events to engage teen audiences:

At the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Youth Insights (created in 1997) offers intensive programs in which teens build sustained relationships with artists, museum staff, and a supportive community of peers while leading

tours, planning events, making and creating art, and developing media projects.

At the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, the centerpiece of teen programs is the Walker Art Center Teen Arts Council (WACTAC, created in 1996), a group of high school student artists and art enthusiasts who meet weekly to design, organize, and market events and programs for their peers and the general public.

At the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH), the Teen Council (created in 1999) introduces young people to contemporary art and provides an arts-based incubator for leadership, visual literacy, and life skill development.

At The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA), teens work with artists, museum professionals, and one another to make art, investigate exhibitions, and plan events through the MOCA teen program (formerly called MOCA Mentors, the MOCA Apprenticeship Program, then the MOCA and Louis Vuitton Young Arts Program).

Although this study is the first of its kind, these museums were not the first to directly engage and empower teens, treating them as an independent audience group and as ambassadors for the institution rather than as part of school or family units. An early precedent is San Francisco's Exploratorium, which has used High School Explainers in its exhibition spaces since opening to the public in 1969. Dozens of science centers and children's museums started teen apprenticeship programs in the 1990s as a result of YouthALIVE!, a national initiative that helped establish and support programs that give teens hands-on work and learning opportunities.<sup>2</sup> In the broader world of creative youth development, out-of-school programs in the arts, humanities, and sciences emphasize creative inquiry and expression as mechanisms for nurturing personal, social, and intellectual capabilities in adolescents.<sup>3</sup>

Within this context, the longevity, visibility, and reputation of the programs in our study are significant strengths, and their teen-oriented perspectives, events, and projects have influenced the public's museum experiences.

### **Framework for Intensive Teen Engagement**

Collaboration among the four museums developed because we recognized that our programs offered fertile territory for learning more about the enduring value of engaging youth. Early in the project, we addressed an essential question: Could four individual teen programs be evaluated as a single model? Each program varied in design, and each had changed organically over time as staff came and went, funding landscapes shifted, and contemporary art and youth culture evolved. But as we looked more deeply, we discovered that the programs were far more alike than

different. These similarities led us to develop a Framework for Intensive Teen Engagement linking shared engagement strategies to short-term outcomes that translate to continuing, long-term gains (fig. 1).

As the starting point for this model, we determined that the programs have five intentional engagement strategies in common. These strategies are typical of youth development programs in general, but they are especially effective in museum settings:

Peer diversity is a key part of the selection process, with teens chosen for what they can contribute and how they can benefit from the program rather than for their academic or artistic achievements. Program staff recruit through schools, community organizations, and outreach to youth and teachers. Sometimes they focus specifically on reaching underserved audiences.

Sustained engagement with peers, staff, and the museum helps teens feel known and valued. Participants spend at least one academic year in the program, meeting weekly after school or on weekends. The museum—an alien, intimidating setting for some—becomes a safe, familiar environment where teens can develop meaningful relationships with peers and adults.

Authentic work with an impact on the museum's community makes teens feel like museum insiders with valuable skills and talents to contribute. Space, staff, and artists are highly accessible, and the work is collaborative, project-based, and culminates in visible results: public programs, events, or exhibitions. Alumni say they felt fortunate and respected in this environment, instead of like stereotypical teens—troubled, isolated, or unwanted.

Interaction with contemporary art and artists connects teens with adults who embrace risk, experimentation, and questioning in their work. Participants engage with art, responding and interacting through dialogue, projects, and activities. They are able to expand their thinking about what art is, what it means in society, the life of a working artist, and prospective careers in the arts.

Supportive staff mentors welcome teens with respect and trust, promoting self-confidence at a stage in life when connecting with adults can be difficult. The programs are staff-intensive and involve professionals from varied backgrounds, including art education, contemporary art, and youth development.

We also observed that despite differences in the geography, content, and format of our programs, the short-term outcomes for teens were the same. A review of existing research and evaluation about positive youth development, art education, and informal learning helped us to identify

five short-term outcomes that we wanted to investigate further: personal development (gaining the self-awareness and understandings needed to reach individual potential and live a fulfilling life); arts participation (frequency of attendance at arts events and organizations, level of active participation with various art forms, and practices related to art appreciation in daily life); leadership (the capacity to think independently, communicate with others, and influence others in an ethical and socially responsible way); artistic and cultural literacy (the ability to observe, analyze, interpret, and make meaning from visual content and cultural values and practices); and social capital (the values, trust, and networks that people use to build bridges with individuals and groups within and outside their communities).<sup>4</sup>

Our study explored what participants experience during the programs and what they carry with them into their adult lives. It also pointed to the public value that museums generate through these young adults, who share the impact of their experiences with their families, their peers, the students they teach in their professional lives, and the audiences for programs they design and art they create. The personal stories and observations included in this report, especially those from alumni who have more than a decade's distance from the programs, gave us particularly rich insights into how these impacts continue to deepen and shift over time. Our research suggests that other museums, guided by the Framework for Intensive Teen Engagement, can have similar impacts, with short-term outcomes persisting over time to take on deeper manifestations that are often life changing. We hope the framework will guide other museums in beginning or deepening engagement with teens in their communities.

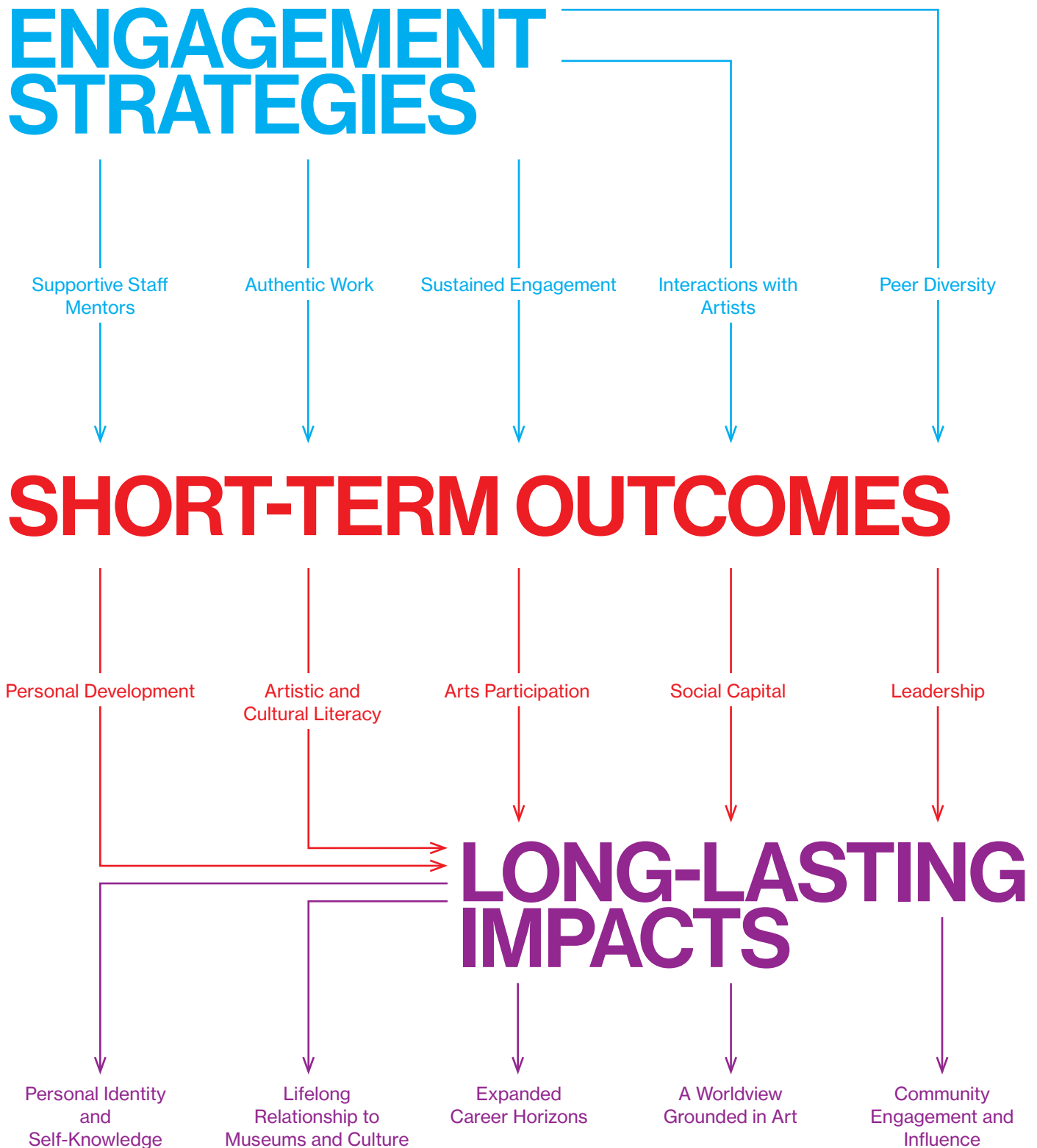
### **About This Report**

Beginning with an overview of the research process (Chapter 1), this report describes the impressive long-term benefits for teen participants (Chapter 2); the positive effects on host museums and the larger community (Chapter 3); and the compelling implications for museum practice (Chapter 4). Profiles describe each program's guiding philosophy, history, assets, and challenges (page 71). Alumni reflections—including visual and interpretive case studies of life experiences—provide powerful evidence to support the study findings. Twelve Journey Maps—created by participants who graduated more than 10 years ago to represent their programs' continuing influence—follow Chapter 2. Snapshots and quotations from Photo Journals show where alumni are today and illuminate their programs' impact on their everyday life and their view of the world. Throughout the report, images of teens in their programs illustrate the range of events, activities, and exhibitions they organize and evoke their spirited presence in the four museums.



**Figure 1: Framework for Intensive Teen Engagement**

Intentional engagement strategies lead to positive short-term outcomes that translate to continuing, long-lasting impacts on program participants.





Teens at the Whitney take on a range of projects, challenging themselves and developing new skills. Working with artist Gary Simmons, Youth Insights created a public art installation incorporating teen voices from all over New York City.

**“So Much Room to Rise”**

When young people are immersed in a learning environment that blends contemporary art, meaningful collaborative work with peers, and supportive interaction with artists and museum staff, they are inspired to see the world differently. John Ildeson—now an artist and art educator—said the MOCA program “exploded my notions of what was possible.” Even years after teens have completed their programs, these experiences continue to play a role in their perceptions of themselves, their capabilities, and their environment.

Treated as individuals with much to contribute, participants become involved co-creators of museum experiences rather than passive recipients of information or educational services. Immersed in art, surrounded by a diverse peer group, and doing authentic work in a nurturing environment that motivates them to succeed, they become problem solvers, decision makers, and community builders—qualities they carry forward into adulthood. Emily Rivlin-Nadler says that, with constructive mentoring and support from Whitney Museum staff members, she and her Youth Insights peers “always felt that we were building toward something important.” She notices the same dynamic today in her work with young people at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum: “I see that they rise to the levels we inspire and empower them to reach for. That was true of my Youth Insights experience, which absolutely gave us so much room to rise.”







The Walker Art Center Teen Arts Council's free monthly Teen Art Lounge events build community among Twin Cities youth. With yarn graffiti artist HOTTEA, teens turned an area outside the museum into an ocean of yarn.







# DESIGNING THE STUDY

“The Walker Art Center Teen Arts Council was the single most important experience I had in high school. It introduced me to the world of contemporary art, made me certain that I wanted an enduring place in it, and gave me invaluable contacts who have helped me along.”

—Walker Art Center teen program participant

We launched this investigation by building on previous research in museums and in the broader field of creative youth development.<sup>5</sup> Observations and anecdotal evidence from staff and participants in the four museums had already documented the transformational effects of their programs on participants' lives—nurturing creative, critical, and visual thinking skills, building confidence and self-esteem, and empowering teens to express their own ideas and listen to multiple perspectives.

But there was much more to learn. Taking a broader view, the research team designed the study to generate quantitative and qualitative information that would incorporate participants' reflections. We experimented with various authentic ways for alumni to tell us about their program experiences and their lives today. Through active dialogue and exchange across the institutions, we looked for insights that would inspire and guide professional practice while sparking further research on youth development and teen engagement in museum settings.

Six questions shaped our research: Do alumni of these teen programs stay connected to arts and cultural organizations? Do they continue to value and participate in the arts in general? Are they inspired and prepared to pursue academic and professional careers in the arts or museums? Are they motivated to use their experiences in their own community engagement work? Do the programs contribute to staff and audience diversity in cultural institutions? And do the short-term benefits permeate each museum's culture and generate a demonstrable long-term impact on the institution?

### **Conceptual Foundation**

The research team's discovery that the four programs were more alike than different led us to decide that we would examine a type of program—an intensive experience geared to teens in a contemporary art museum—rather than a single museum site. This aspect of the research was driven by a desire for a more sophisticated understanding of teen engagement. Instead of focusing narrowly on program activities and elements, we wanted to identify common essential strategies, short-term outcomes, and long-term impacts of a successful program. We devised multiple methods, including an alumni survey, focus groups, case studies, and interviews, to gather richly contextual and nuanced quantitative and qualitative data. Data collection and analysis respected the uniqueness of each program while seeking to identify common essential design features, outcomes, and long-term impacts of a successful program.

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, we took a rigorous practitioner-researcher approach. Museum staff members were essential, active participants during all research phases, while the experienced researcher,

Mary Ellen Munley, served in an advisory and training capacity. Although in some studies, close affiliation with a program is a disqualifying criterion for serving on a research team to avoid contaminating perspective, this study took the position that team members' unique knowledge of and interaction with programs and participants were valuable assets, especially in formulating study questions and data collection instruments and during data analysis. The researcher gave tutorials on study design, survey development, qualitative data analysis, and other topics, while team members had responsibility for all aspects of the research. As a result, the outcomes are of particular interest to practitioners, and the teens' experiences are represented with care and authenticity.

Along with surveys and interviews, the study used arts-based information-gathering methods, which align with two important features of the program experience: artistic and personal expression. Journey Maps and Photo Journals created by alumni served as raw data, conveying information in highly visual, nonlinear ways that yielded deeper understanding of the long-term impact of their experiences. In addition, the Photo Journals gave the team insight into aspects of alumni's lives (for example, their workplaces, artwork, or homes) that typically are not available through more conventional methods. (Journey Maps appear on pages 39–51. Photo Journals are illustrated throughout this report.)

### **Reconnecting with Participants**

The four programs considered in this study were launched between 1992 and 1999 and have generally served 12 to 15 students a year. The study is based on the programs from their beginning through spring 2011. When data collection began, in 2011, participants and alumni ranged in age from 18 to 36; more than 600 students had participated over the combined lives of the programs.

A first step for the research team was to track down alumni and reconnect with them. Even in the age of Facebook, this process proved challenging, as residences, jobs, and contact information change frequently for this demographic group. Through a combination of tactics over six months—from mailings and cold calls to social media monitoring and in-person networking—we confirmed current contact information for 70 to 80 percent of former participants across all four programs. Having thus re-established contact with generations of alumni—many of whom had lost touch with the museum or their program, particularly at sites where staff turnover was highest—we discovered that their reaction was enthusiastic, and they were eager to share their reflections and personal stories.





Teens at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, develop a voice of their own by interacting with both peers and adults.

### What We Asked

Our diverse arts-based data collection methods enabled an especially complex look at how these innovative programs have yielded deep and lasting impacts for their participants. In spring 2012, we administered an online survey to all alumni for whom current contact information was available, with impressive returns—a response rate of 67 percent and, among those, a completion rate of 84 percent. We sought information about demographics, academic and career paths, level of arts participation, and alumni perceptions of the program's influence on the development of traits like leadership, social capital, personal identity, and cultural literacy. Focus groups of alumni of different ages and backgrounds from all four museums explored their specific memories of their time in the program and their thoughts about how those experiences affected them.

Case studies delved deeper into the life experiences of 24 alumni. Twelve respondents created Photo Journals that captured their perceptions of the teen program's continuing influence. Each subject documented everyday experiences for a week, chose 10 representative images, and wrote short interpretive captions reflecting on the program's impact on their lives today. A separate

group of 12 alumni who had been out of high school 10 years or more created Journey Maps—visual representations of their paths in relation to art, museums, and careers since graduating from the teen program. The maps served as a starting point for interviews probing certain questions, such as how the teen program experience may have changed a participant's existing relationship to art and museums over time.

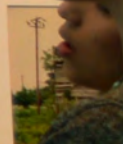
Valuable observations about the long-term impact of intensive teen programs on the four institutions themselves came from in-depth interviews with directors and current and former staff. These conversations contributed to an understanding of the programs' development, strengths, challenges, and influence across the museums. They also touched on the implications of this teen engagement model for the museum field as a whole.

An auxiliary publication on study methodology (see [whitney.org/roomtorise](http://whitney.org/roomtorise)) provides detailed information on research samples, data collection and analysis procedures, sample instruments, and more. A list of individuals who contributed to this project as reviewers, advisors, or critical friends appears in the Acknowledgments (p. 84).

Close looking and open-ended conversation about art is an influential part of teen programs. CAMH Teen Council members, shown here with Menil Collection curatorial assistant Susan Sutton, visited the Menil as part of a curatorial collaboration between the two Houston museums.









# CHANGING LIVES

"The exposure I had to contemporary art was crucial in shaping who I've become today: a student aspiring to become an educator, philosopher, artist, and better human."

—The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,  
teen program participant

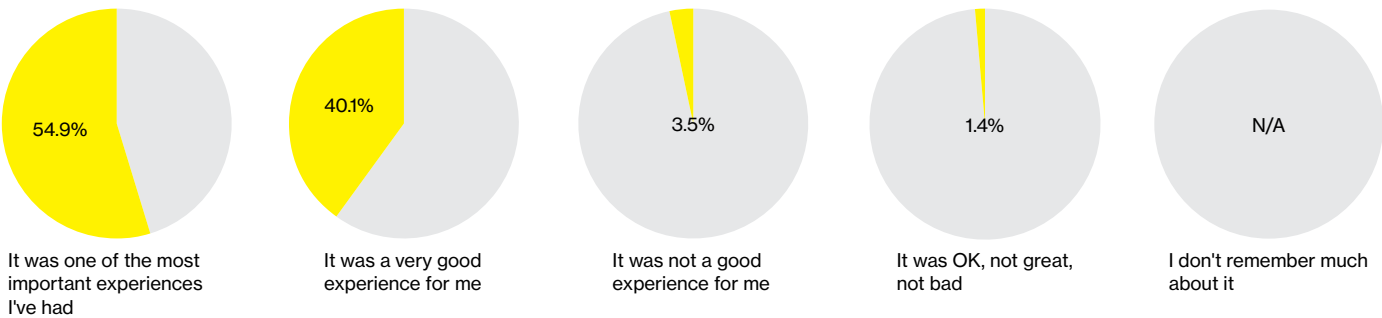
As Emmanuel Mauleón was combining thoughts and images in his Photo Journal for this study, he said, he recognized “how many of my daily interactions are informed by the skills and analytical techniques I began developing at the Walker Art Center.” Observations about profound, sustained personal influence surface repeatedly in alumni’s reflections on the value of their experiences. They recall that time clearly, and many consider it one of the most important and rewarding events of their lives. Ninety-five percent of survey respondents—who had completed their program from one to 19 years earlier—considered the teen program to be either a very good experience (40 percent) or one of the most important experiences they have had (55 percent). When asked to rank major influences in their youth on a five-point scale from very positive to very negative, on average 75 percent of respondents across all four institutions rated their program as the highest positive influence—even more than family (fig. 3). Two-thirds of alumni echoed Mauleón’s realization that they were often in situations where the experience affected their thoughts or actions.

Our findings revealed five significant areas of long-term influence: a growth in confidence and the emergence of personal identity and self-knowledge; deep, lifelong relationships to museums and culture; a self-assured, intellectually curious pursuit of expanded career horizons and life skills; a lasting worldview grounded in art; and a commitment to community engagement and influence.

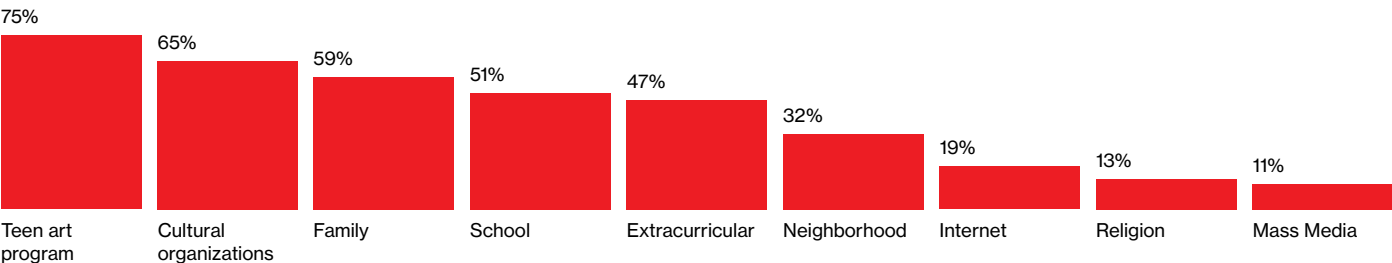
**Comfortable Without a Mask On: Personal Identity and Self-Knowledge**

A decade has passed, but William DeNatale remembers his time in the Whitney Museum’s Youth Insights program “like it was yesterday.” Now in his late 20s and a practicing artist and educator, he says the program instilled confidence, showed him the value of self-reflection, and led him to make a habit of constructive questioning—and even showed him how to use humor to break tension. For his Photo Journal, he chose images that represent the direct connections between his life today and his time at the museum. “The experience

**Figure 2: How Alumni Describe Their Program Experiences**  
Alumni have highly positive recollections of their teen program involvement. More than half of survey respondents say it was one of the most important experiences they have had.



**Figure 3: Experiences Alumni Identify as Positive Influences**  
Alumni rated the teen program experience as the most positive influence on their young lives. The number is similar for recent alumni and for those who experienced the program 15 to 20 years ago.





definitely helped me understand myself, as well as my relationship to art and people. Being in Youth Insights during those teenage years of awkward awareness helped me to be comfortable without a mask on, which is a great thing, I think."

Other alumni describe similar personal growth—a steadily emerging sense of identity, confidence, achievement, and empowerment—as a powerful, lasting benefit of intensive teen programs. Designed to support the critical development

that happens during the often difficult years of adolescence, these programs invite teens to take on and meet new challenges, explore identity, beliefs, and values through learning about art, and adopt real responsibilities that build on their strengths. The programs align the content of contemporary art with eight principles that the National Research Council describes as contributing to positive youth development: physical and psychological safety; appropriate structure; supportive relationships; opportunities to belong; positive social norms; support for efficacy and mattering;



#### Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot

**William DeNatale** believes that his experience in the Whitney's Youth Insights built confidence and shaped his sense of self. "This photo is of an emergency departure from a dysfunctional plane. As a teenager in Youth Insights, talking about and being surrounded by art all the time gave me confidence in alternative and unorthodox ways of thinking. I have continued to question where I'm going and the direction we're going collectively, getting off and rerouting when something seems not right."

opportunities for skill building; and integration of family, school, and community efforts.<sup>6</sup> Responses from alumni suggest that the expanded self-awareness and confidence they experience continue to shape their behavior over time.

When asked to identify the best part of the program, many alumni commented on the rewards of personal growth, including emerging self-esteem, feelings of accomplishment, and the assurance to come out of their shells. They reported becoming more comfortable with speaking their mind: “I wasn’t exactly shy as a youth, but I didn’t share my voice in or outside the classroom either,” said one Whitney participant. “Since being part of Youth Insights, I have not had issues with expressing my opinions. [This quality] has been very important in propelling me for success in my career, my network, my life.” Sixty-two percent of respondents felt that the program had a great or strong impact on their level of self-awareness, and 49 percent said it had a great or strong impact on the evolution of their values and priorities (fig. 4). Several said they came away

with a lasting belief in their own potential that has benefited them in other situations and life experiences. Many recalled that they felt special and competent during their time at the museum. “The experience across the board was saying, ‘As a young person, you are an expert in young people,’” said Leila Darabi of the Walker. “That was really, at that age, the first time anyone had described me as an expert in anything.” Meredith Truax of CAMH marveled at the autonomy: “There are few places that would give a group of 14- to 19-year-olds that kind of free rein. It was empowering to be trusted with that much responsibility.” For some, the museum as an institution was associated with a certain level of prestige and authority that gave their experience additional value and helped hesitant or reluctant parents to be supportive of their teens’ new afterschool activities. Participants valued the chance to try new things in an encouraging environment and felt successful when they completed challenging tasks and projects. The Walker, said one alum, was “one of the first institutional environments in which I saw myself as an asset rather than a liability.”



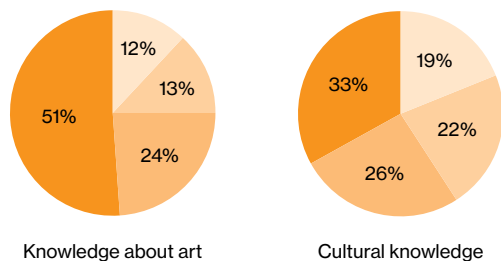
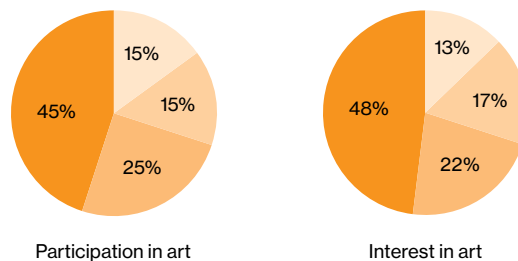
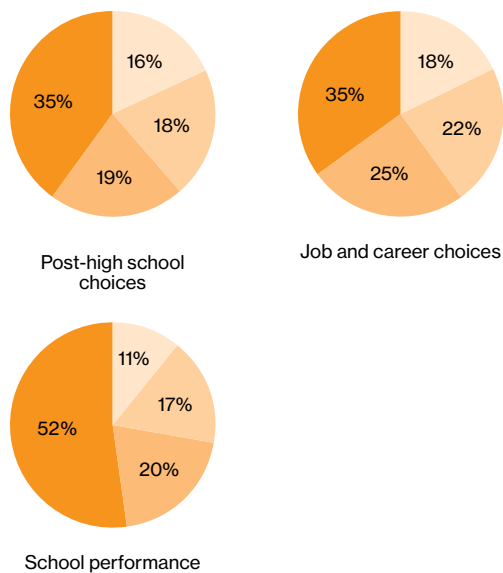
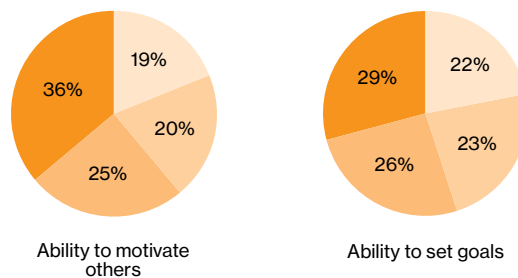
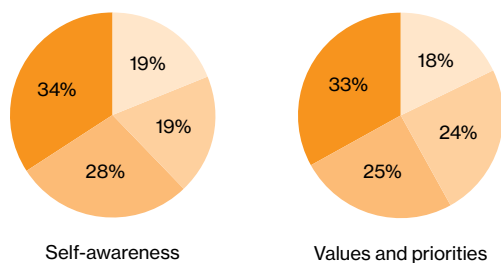
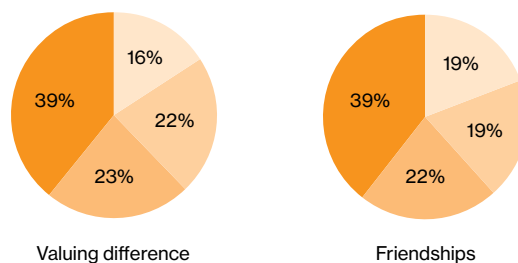
Youth Insights participants come out of their shells and get comfortable in the museum during a teen event with Biennial artists My Barbarian.



**Figure 4: The Staying Power of Individual Outcomes**

Years after completing the programs, alumni continue to report that the experience contributed to artistic and cultural literacy, arts participation, career choices, leadership skills, personal identity, and social capital. Survey respondents indicated how strong an influence the program had on different areas of their development.

Great  
Strong  
Some  
Little

**4.1 Artistic and Cultural Literacy****4.2 Arts Participation****4.3 Career Choices****4.4 Leadership****4.5 Personal Identity****4.6 Social Capital**

This enhanced self-knowledge has persisted, said older alumni who had been out of the program for at least 10 years. Their ongoing quest for personal identity has been backed by greater confidence because of the program, and the capacity for critical questioning has proven to be a valuable long-term benefit. As Charles Galberth explained,

*I walked away understanding why it's important to question who I am. And I don't think in American society that we really do get that ability; we don't get to question who we are, because society tells us, this is who you're supposed to be. . . . Youth Insights allows . . . young people to learn who they are, but learn who they are through art, and in that define themselves.*

### At Home in the Museum: Lifelong Relationships to Museums and Culture

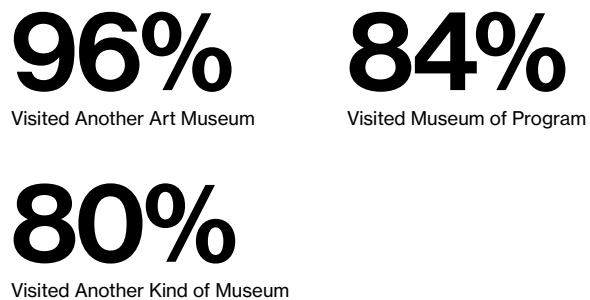
Over the years, the Walker Art Center has been a “sanctuary” to Mischa Kegan, now in his 30s and the museum’s teen programs coordinator as well as a practicing artist. He perceives all museums this way, observing that “you can go to any museum anywhere in the world and it can be your home for however long you’re there.” The program demystified both art and museums for Kegan. Intrigued by the behind-the-scenes operations of the Walker, he came to understand that museums are more than just places where art is exhibited: “It’s more than just paintings on the wall. There are really important things going on. And the people in museums are giving themselves to you in so many ways—from the most well-known artist to a tour guide or a guard.” Without these kinds of experiences in WACTAC as a teen, he believes, he wouldn’t have such a close and rewarding long-term connection to museums as an adult.

The most obvious and extensively documented influence among alumni was observed in their relationships with museums. Across all demographics and institutions, alumni like Kegan described changed perceptions, a sense of belonging in museums, active visitation and engagement, and a deep valuing of the role of museums in society. They have come to view museums as places of learning, employment, enjoyment, and sanctuary, and they have sophisticated critical perspectives that sometimes lead them to question the museum status quo.

For the uninitiated, museums are sometimes seen as alien, intimidating, and baffling environments, and these teens had been no different. Many respondents had not been museumgoers before joining their program. Jia Gu of MOCA described anticipating a “weird museum culture.” Natilee Harren of the Walker agreed: “I think it’s a common thing for people who don’t go to museums regularly to talk about how they don’t like going to museums, or they feel uncomfortable because they’re

**Figure 5: Frequency of Museum Visitation**

Alumni are active museumgoers as adults, with a significant majority returning to the museum of their program in the last two years and visiting other museums as well.

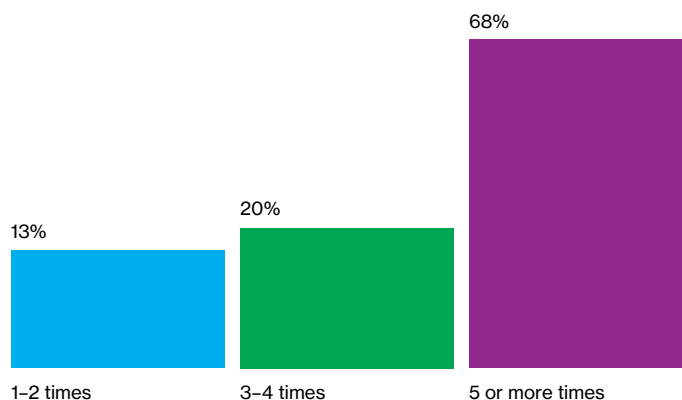


not supposed to touch anything, and there are all these rules, and everything is so pristine, and they don’t know how to behave.”

But after participating in the teen program, alumni reported, they felt as though a veil had been lifted and the entire place had been made accessible to them. A CAMH participant said the intensive engagement “made me feel at home at the museum and gave me a sort of ownership of it as being a place I was very welcome and encouraged to come to. I still seek out museums as places of solace because of this.” Alumni also said they gained a facility for engaging with artworks, objects, and other content in museums, and an understanding of how to act within museum environments. These feelings extended beyond their museum, translating to a general sense of comfort, ownership, and empowerment in other museums and cultural institutions and spaces. Gu said her MOCA experience helped her realize that these places are “accessible to everyone. Not just museums, but all parts of the arts and culture opened up to me.”

**Figure 6: Frequency of Art Museum Visitation**

Alumni are frequent museum visitors as adults and attribute their high museum attendance in the last two years to their teen program experiences.



Alumni visit museums frequently as adults. Of those who provided additional information about their visits, 84 percent said that they had visited their program's museum in the past two years (fig. 5). About 30 percent had returned to the museum five or more times during that period, and 68 percent had visited other art museums five or more times. Across the board, alumni showed a sustained pattern of art museum visits (fig. 6). These visitation rates are higher than those reported in the National Endowment for the Arts' 2012 *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, which cited that 21 percent of adult respondents had visited an art museum or gallery in the past year.<sup>7</sup>

While higher than average museum visitation may be expected among a group of young, educated, arts-interested individuals, probing during case studies and focus groups revealed that alumni attribute their current engagement with museums to their teen program experiences, even decades later. "Every time I enter a museum, I think about MOCA," said one former participant. Another noted that Youth Insights "helped change the way I feel about museums and their value. I went from being the kind of kid who would never go on his own volition to visiting the museum on some of my off days and bringing friends along with me."

These findings of sustained engagement with arts and cultural institutions may be especially significant in light of the background of participating teens. Several recent studies have noted disparities in cultural participation among racial and ethnic groups. An American Alliance of Museums survey found that "non-Hispanic white Americans were over-represented among adult art museum visitors in 2008 (78.9 percent of visitors, while just 68.7 percent of the U.S. population), while Hispanics and African Americans were significantly underrepresented. Indeed, people of color were less likely to participate in the arts across the full range of activities measured in the survey."<sup>8</sup>

Each of these intensive teen programs has a demonstrated commitment to serving a diverse cohort of teens, including youth from a range of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. More than 50 percent of Whitney respondents and more than 79 percent of MOCA respondents identified as nonwhite, with many coming from environments where they had little to no access to cultural institutions like museums prior to their participation. Our study shows that the comfort, confidence, and agency that these programs foster in participants forge new patterns for arts participation that defy national trends.



Engaging and collaborating with artists is an important ingredient in intensive teen programs. At the Walker Art Center, four teens created a performance with artist Jaime Carrera during a WACTAC-organized event.



Teens at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, connect through weekly meetings, forming long-term relationships with each other.









(For detailed demographic information about survey and case study respondents, see [whitney.org/roomtorise](http://whitney.org/roomtorise).)

The programs' impact on participants' relationship with museums played out in other ways as well. Alumni gained an expanded view of museums as places to learn and work, and some were motivated to pursue museum-related careers. Some alumni also sought to replicate aspects of their program experiences for others. Describing his Journey Map, Luis Martin told the story of starting a

summer teen program at El Museo del Barrio in New York City: "I called it the Muse Project, and I had high school students come in and job-shadow and give tours and do everything that I got to do [at MOCA], with the same amount of freedom and the same amount of accessibility that I had. So it was just a great circle." This desire to give back is observed in other contexts, as many alumni have created positive youth development and education opportunities within their communities (see "Altering the World," later in this chapter).

#### **Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot**

Artist and educator **David Coyne** explains that the MOCA program enhanced his aesthetic sensibilities, transforming his perspective on the world. "The ironwork in this image is clearly meant to be ornamental, but the composition of the hose and the cracks and wear on the wall all become decoration as well. I stop and look at the world around me much more than I did before my internship at MOCA in 2002. Little moments of observation like this really enrich an otherwise indifferent task of walking down the street."



While program alumni remained highly engaged with museums and expressed the value of their role in society, some developed complex critical perspectives on museums, particularly regarding their role in their communities, issues of inclusion, exclusion, and voice, and the relationship between art and commerce. Some preferred to visit small galleries or artist studios, for example, or were working within the museum context to develop programming that more closely reflected their values. Mauléon of the Walker observed that “you start to see how [the museum] works and then you start to wonder why it works that way. . . . Some of the questions in our discussions were extremely critical and kind of fostered a sharper look at how things in the art world worked.” Tellingly, because of the freedom to question the status quo that they developed in their teen programs, alumni who do go on to work in museums and other cultural institutions may be uniquely positioned to push forward innovative practices.

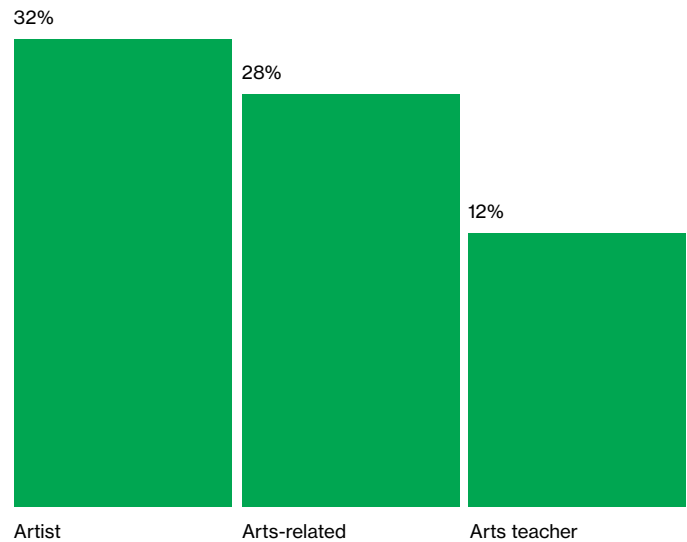
### A Changed Field of Vision: Expanded Career Horizons and Life Skills

Ciarán Finlayson’s Photo Journal is filled with images tracing the varied influences of CAMH’s Teen Council on his current life direction. “I would likely not be doing any of the things I do every day had I not been selected for TC,” he says. Conversations with a museum curator inspired him to study art history and pursue a museum career. Hands-on experience at CAMH and a personal introduction from the Teen Council director led to two internships. And exposure to art in the museum has been “instrumental in the development of my political consciousness and in my thinking about blackness.” Finlayson is now a graduate student in aesthetics and art theory at Kingston University in London.

Working alongside professionals in a museum setting reveals potential career directions and opportunities, helps teens crystallize their professional goals, and promotes long-term academic and career development. Alumni reported that their program empowered them to explore career possibilities in the arts that they may not otherwise have known about. When asked to reflect on what they took away from their experiences, alumni across all four museums responded most frequently that the program motivated them to pursue a career in the arts. Seventy-nine percent have held a professional position in the arts; 51 percent felt the program had a great or strong influence on their post-high school academic and career choices; and 57 percent said it had a great or strong influence on their job and career choice (figs. 7 and 8). “Teen Council inspired me to create more diverse and fertile art education programs for teens everywhere,” said Chanelle Frazier. “I have always felt connected to the CAMH community, and I have had access to so many things I would never have come across as a result of the program.”

**Figure 7: Alumni Currently Working in the Arts**

More than half of alumni are now artists or work in arts-related occupations.



**Figure 8: From Teen Program to Career**

Teen programs influenced participants’ career choices and academic paths. Alumni have pursued professional arts-related careers, and many say their programs are relevant to their everyday work.

**79%**

Have held a professional position in the arts

**51%**

Said the program had a great or strong influence on their post high-school choices

**57%**

Said it had a great or strong influence on their job and career choice

**58%**

Said it is extremely relevant or very relevant to their work today

Many alumni directly attributed their career choices to their involvement in the teen program, and they structured their academic pathways around those goals. “In my high school, I was the only student considering going for a BFA,” said a CAMH participant. “The Teen Council was my only contact with other young artists who helped me compare and contrast college choices that my high school counselor knew only a little about. After choosing to attend Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, my experience at the Teen Council influenced my desire to continue to work within art institutions.”





A teen council member at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston experiments with videography.

Alumni outperformed national averages for high school graduation and had successful track records for college and postgraduate enrollment. Among the respondents, 100 percent had completed high school (the national average is 75.5 percent), and 96 percent pursued formal education beyond high school. Fifty-five percent of all alumni in the study had earned a four-year college or postgraduate degree by the time the study was conducted, and because 32 percent of alumni were enrolled in college when they completed the survey, that percentage will almost certainly increase. While it may be expected that many of these youth, who self-selected for a challenging extracurricular opportunity, would outperform their peers, it is worth noting that during their programs' early years MOCA and the Whitney intentionally sought out teens considered at risk for dropping out of high school.

At least one student credited the teen program as a primary motivation to complete high school: "I was a terrible student in high school and was really depressed. I wanted to drop out, get my GED, and go to a city school, but the

director of Youth Insights told me that I wouldn't be able to be a part of the program if I did. That was one of the main reasons I didn't drop out of school."

While being part of a close-knit creative community of peers, artists, and mentors with a shared passion for art influenced many toward a career in that field, the program activities helped the teens qualify for professional and academic opportunities no matter what their career aspirations were. Specific program experiences—such as leading tours, spending time in museum galleries, doing outreach, and working with artists—shaped goals in other fields. The teen programs also offered a network of contacts and resources that helped some alumni advance their long-term career development. Twenty-five percent of survey respondents said their museum connections had a major or important impact on their current careers, and case studies revealed several examples of direct or indirect influences. Emily Rivlin-Nadler, now a museum educator, discovered her professional path. "I had no idea there was museum education," she recalled. "Youth Insights



completely changed my field of vision of what was possible in ways to work with art. I fell in love with reaching out to the public, bringing them into the space, and making them part of the conversation.”

Museum staff understand the program’s role in opening doors for teen participants to pursue careers in the arts. “They have a whole new perspective on what a museum is, what a museum can be,” said Vasundhara Prabhu, former director of education at MOCA. “They certainly have a perspective on contemporary art and artists, and I also think that there’s this whole career path that’s made open to them and available to them.”

Participants also develop highly useful, transferable skills and competencies that promote success along their career paths and in the workplace. As a central feature of these

programs, they do collaborative work that contributes to the museum’s programming in meaningful, visible ways. Specific projects vary from museum to museum or even from year to year, but they all incorporate tasks that culminate in a product or event presented by the museum. Through these challenging but supported activities—leading tours, planning events, curating exhibitions, or publishing zines—teens gain experience in problem solving, goal setting, motivating others, articulating complex and abstract concepts, creative and critical thinking, and engaging in open-ended, inquiry-based investigations of the world around them. They also learn authentic, transferable skills, such as event planning, public speaking, and artistic and teaching techniques. Alumni associated their facilitated explorations of art in these programs with expanding and deepening their abilities to engage in questioning, reflection, and critique later in life.

#### Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot

Youth Insights introduced **Shaniece Frank** to career possibilities she hadn’t imagined. A recent college graduate, she is now the school and educator programs assistant at the Whitney. “As a visual arts and education self-guided major in college, I wore this apron when I was working: Work in Progress. Before Youth Insights I was 100 percent sure that I was going to be a psychology major. Afterwards I realized that the days that I spent at the Whitney in the galleries and in the studio were my happiest days, the days that I looked forward to the most. So I decided that museum education is what I want to do with my life.”



When asked to assess the importance of various program elements, 58 percent of survey respondents rated the opportunity to develop new skills as extremely important. Responses varied by program, depending on the specific activities teens performed. At the Whitney, for example, 69 percent of alumni described the opportunity to practice public speaking when leading gallery tours as extremely important (a much higher percentage than at other sites, where guiding tours was less of a program focus).

As alumni reflected on this aspect of their programs, they emphasized that they continue to use what they learned. A former MOCA participant recognized both the short-term benefits and the long-term impact of the work she did at the museum: “I gained skills and experiences that I’ll be using for the rest of my life.” She especially valued the chance to work as part of a project team, to speak to groups, and to practice expressing her opinion and listening to others.

Even those who did not go on to pursue careers in the arts realized such linkages. Shahrina Ankhi-Krol, now an attorney, drew connections between discussing contemporary art as a teen and her present vocation, describing the skills she needs in the courtroom as similar to those she learned by leading tours. Her Youth Insights experience enables her to “make great legal arguments because I can take completely

abstract ideas and put them into very concise, critical points of view. . . . Honestly, I don’t think I would be a lawyer had it not been for the Whitney’s training.”

### **I See Art Anywhere: A Worldview Grounded in Art**

For Emmanuel Mauleón, an artist, graphic designer, and Rhode Island School of Design graduate living in New York, art and life converged in WACTAC. He confesses that he hated contemporary art when a friend talked him into—reluctantly—joining the Walker’s program in high school. “The art world can seem very insular or foreign to a casual observer,” he wrote in his Photo Journal. Today he tells people who find art intimidating that it is “like a language. You have to work at it to understand it, but that work opens you up to a very rewarding and different worldview.” Mauleón says the skills he developed—“deep curiosity, thoughtful critique and questioning, connections and avenues for engaging with previously foreign or unnoticed things—continue to be central tenets in my everyday life.”

Teens in these programs solidify an active, deep, and lasting engagement with art. Many describe a changed worldview and the emergence of an arts-based identity that is complex, profound, and sustained. Through this new lens, art can be anything, anywhere. While some teens

### **Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot**

**Ciarán Finlayson’s** academic and career path has taken him from the CAMH Teen Council, through college and internships with museums and cultural organizations, to graduate work in aesthetics and art theory. “This is my workspace at my Smithsonian internship. I was told that I was appointed in large part because the work I had done as an intern at CAMH was exactly what they wanted me to do at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.”





may start with an interest in art or creative expression, the opportunity to do authentic, collaborative work in the museum, combined with exposure to contemporary art forms and practitioners, leads many to interweave art with their notions of community, identity, learning, career, recreation, collaboration, and self-expression. Corey Towers said the CAMH program drew him “a lot closer to what art is. Especially for a young person, art can really appear very high and mighty and on a pedestal that is hard to approach.”

His experience “made everything about art very human to me, more approachable and not something that was reserved for special people.”

Art forms the core of all four intensive teen programs, which emphasize spending time in the galleries, exploring works of art together through close looking, open-ended conversation about art, and other activities rooted in museum pedagogy. Participants learn how to look at,

#### Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot

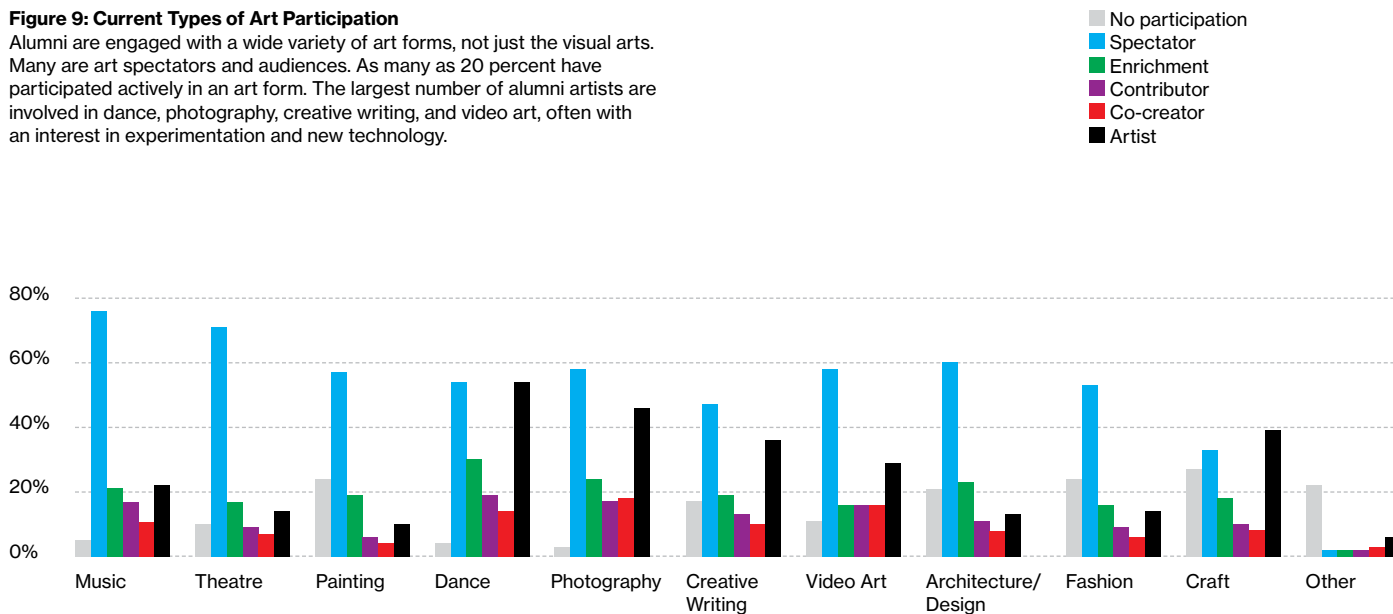
**Emmanuel Mauleón** feels the Walker's influence in his work as a graphic designer. When he creates paint swatches and test gradients like the one shown here, he perceives the subtle differences among colors and then communicates those distinctions to clients. “WACTAC was one of the places where my critical capacities began to develop. Trying to articulate my feelings about contemporary art effectively to a group of teenagers forced me to engage with a completely foreign language. Today many of my daily interactions are informed by the skills and analytical techniques I began developing in WACTAC and later in art school.”





**Figure 9: Current Types of Art Participation**

Alumni are engaged with a wide variety of art forms, not just the visual arts. Many are art spectators and audiences. As many as 20 percent have participated actively in an art form. The largest number of alumni artists are involved in dance, photography, creative writing, and video art, often with an interest in experimentation and new technology.



engage with, discuss, and make meaning from art, skills that promote the development of visual and artistic literacy. Alumni responses reveal that this comfort and fluency with contemporary art is lasting and transferable, translating to other art forms, media, and contexts, just as comfort in the museum environment generalizes to other cultural settings. “The Whitney program instilled in me a great confidence for talking about artwork,” one Youth Insights participant said. “I developed a vocabulary and set of observational tools that empowered me to approach any work of art as something available for me to experience.”

When asked to consider various program features, 74 to 80 percent of alumni across the four museums rated learning about art, learning how to understand art, and making connections between art and their personal lives as extremely or very important. Fewer than 40 percent judged learning how to make art as extremely or very important, highlighting these programs’ focus on artistic and cultural literacy rather than studio-based instruction.

Across all institutions, 70 to 75 percent of alumni surveyed indicated that the program had either a great or strong impact on their level of knowledge, participation, and interest in art. Alumni continue to participate in the arts as artists, spectators, and active participants (fig. 9). They engage with a wide array of artistic disciplines, from music and dance to painting, photography, sculpture, and crafts, often with an interest in experimentation or new technology. They go to see art in various settings, and as many as 20 percent have participated actively in an art form—such as contributing to a community mosaic project, singing in a chorus, or entering a photograph in an online exhibition.

Many but not all alumni had originally sought out these programs because they had an active or nascent interest in art and museums. In an open-ended survey question, across all four museums, interest in art and a desire to be part of an arts community were the reasons most frequently cited for participating. Many respondents said that although they were interested in or curious about art, their high schools lacked a robust art program, and they wanted to fill that void. A few alumni recalled they had had little to no experience with or interest in art—particularly modern or contemporary art—before entering the program, and instead had pursued the opportunity because a friend or teacher encouraged them or for material incentives, with little knowledge of what they were getting into.

The knowledge of art and art history that the teens gained through their exposure to the host museums’ collections, exhibitions, resources, and artists has also endured. Participants’ responses suggest that these programs increase interest in and readiness for college-level art history programs and other advanced studies in art as well as preparation for future careers. Some participants felt they were “ahead” as they moved into other educational and work environments. “I really believe my time on the CAMH Teen Council shaped who I have become as an adult,” said an alum. “I came to art school after graduating high school with a much richer knowledge of contemporary art than many of my classmates. Many of my professors noted this in my first year of undergrad. I also still love museums and work and volunteer in them to this day.”

The opportunity to meet and work with artists had a particularly significant impact on participants, humanizing



#### Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot

**Lenne Klingaman**, a professional actor, says that her time at the Walker inspired her to see art all around her and to continue creating art. "There's beauty in everything. We know that. I act, but I like to make art for myself. I don't show people. Because when I stop and take the time to appreciate something as ridiculously fantastic as a garish \$13 2-by-2-foot Rice Krispie treat, I find I am present and seeing the world. I was trained to look at the world with new eyes during WACTAC."

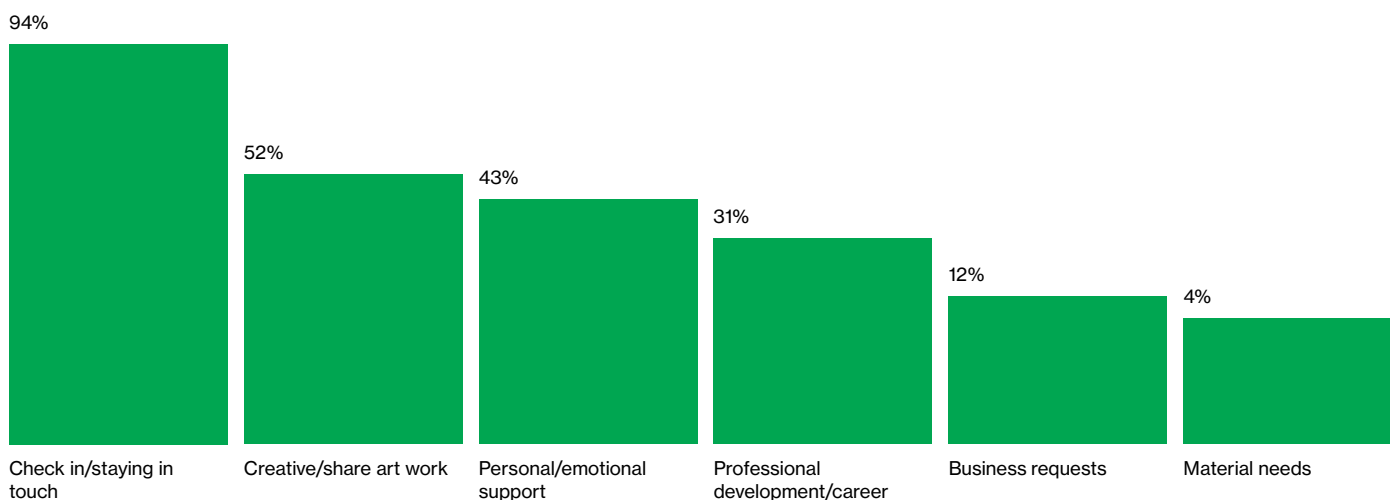
art and making a path in the arts seem more attainable. "I have more respect for artists I don't quite understand," said an alum from MOCA. "I am not so quick to judge art that I don't necessarily agree with or like or understand the purpose of. Just because I can't see it doesn't mean it's not there." Asked to name the best part of the program, many respondents highlighted these experiences. Their comments reiterate an affinity that was pointed out more than 15 years ago in the Walker Art Center's *Teen Programs How-To Kit*: "There is an immediate connection between artists and teens—both are actively engaged in overturning conventional wisdom and questioning the status quo."<sup>9</sup>

#### Altering the World: Community Engagement and Influence

Kathleen Gutierrez's community-centered youth empowerment work in public health is infused with principles she absorbed through MOCA's Apprenticeship Program. She said the parallels with art-centered youth development are clear: "Both require stellar adult allies who enjoy working with young people. Both require skillful planning in order to empower young people's agency and autonomous work. And both require sustainability." A self-described "art history nerd," her time at MOCA combined an immersion in art with exposure to values and practices she now integrates into her professional life of community advocacy.

**Figure 10: Current Contact with Other Alumni**

Alumni say they stay in touch with their peers, with many engaging in creative collaboration, providing personal support, or talking about professional development.



Participants value community, collaboration, and diversity as a result of these programs. Like Gutierrez, they develop a stronger appreciation for the importance of service and a desire to give back, prompting many to take on leadership roles in their communities. Over one or more academic years, teens have the opportunity to get to know each other well and form close and trusting relationships with both peers and museum staff. They build support networks, friendships, and knowledge about how organizations and groups function—all aspects of increased social capital that supports community engagement. “Youth Insights is where my idea of community originates,” said Azikiwe Mohammed. “A group of people who come together with a common idea in mind can make a new whole from different pieces of differing materials. The pieces are the ideas; the materials are the people. Every week I would watch this happen, and I didn’t know it was possible.” In a lighthearted take on the experience, one alum described the CAMH group as “a family—a weird, kooky art-based family that had the best intentions for the museum.”

At the time of the survey, 82 percent of alumni reported that they were still in touch with other participants (fig. 10). Many continued to interact for creative, personal, and professional reasons, sharing artwork and seeking support. Over time these relationships, because they are based on experiences working with a diverse peer group toward shared goals, led teens to value community and collaboration even if they had disliked group work when they entered the program, as Marisa Miller did: “I was pretty introverted when it came to doing art and doing a lot of different things, and so [the CAMH program] pushed me to collaborate

where I was not a kid that collaborated.” Another alum agreed: “I used to think that things were better when done alone. The CAMH Teen Council was the first instance in which I saw how extremely productive collaborating with other creative minds could be.”

The positive effects of collaboration are also tied to the group’s composition. These programs are by nature communal experiences. The program coordinators actively recruit a diverse cohort and select them based on a variety of factors to ensure that they represent distinct backgrounds and levels of experience. When asked to describe the best part of the program, the importance of the peer group was one of three factors that alumni identified most frequently. Many reported finding unexpected personal connections with people from different backgrounds. “I got to meet with these people who I never would have connected with because we were separated by distance or class or race—not just meet them, but also connect with them,” said a MOCA participant. A shared interest in art and the experience of working collaboratively helped teens overcome perceived differences and learn how to communicate with others unlike themselves. A Walker alum observed that the diversity of the program “challenged and fortified my understanding of the world I live in. It gave me a better grasp of who and where I am.” Teens felt special and accepted by their peers, part of a unique community. This experience also gave them confidence in unfamiliar settings. When starting college, for example, teen program participants felt they were more comfortable and adaptable when meeting new students.





#### Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot

**Kathleen Gutierrez** has carried her MOCA experience into her public health career as she trains high school students to teach their peers about their health care rights.

"From this simple workspace I work with college-age and high school students on advocacy for school-based health centers. I also run a weekly youth development program that requires me to be as compelling as [MOCA educators] Catherine and Denise were while I was in MAP."

Alumni credited their time in the program with instilling a sense of service and a desire to share these positive experiences. Some, like Gutierrez, have gone on to become organizers, educators, and leaders who create youth development opportunities for others. John Idefonso said exposure to contemporary artists through MOCA's program led him "to return this same experience to my community. I teach afterschool art classes at two local libraries in central Los Angeles. I introduce art to families, inviting discussions about culture, art, and relevance to a multicultural and multilingual community, and then we create our own artwork that represents the themes and process that we've shared."

Museum leaders and staff understood that this outcome is significant, and they recognized that the program's impact and influence are magnified by teens' desires to give back. Olga Viso, Walker Art Center director, described the rewards of seeing WACTAC alumni, some now in their 30s, run youth programs in their communities:

*It's pretty fantastic to see how these individuals become... creative influencers in their communities. But they're also committed to helping youth and helping shape museum programs.... It's not just what happens to the participants and their impact, but... from year to year, a group of 16 WACTAC teens influences programming for 20,000 teens... in the community.*

#### Outliers

A small percentage of respondents reported that they did not have a very positive experience in the program or felt they had not taken full advantage of the opportunities it afforded. Some students said that, on completing the program, they had unrealistic expectations, feelings of disappointment or frustration, or an inflated sense of access and entitlement. During a focus group in Los Angeles, alumni from all four programs were frank about disappointments and missed opportunities. Some recalled they were either too introverted—"I wasn't the most social teen, so

**Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot**

**Azikiwe Mohammed**, a working artist, recently taught digital animation to children in the Tribeca neighborhood where he has lived all his life. This video still represents his multiple roles: artist, teacher, and community builder. “Community was one of the words I remember sounding off the Whitney’s walls more than any other. Community: the one we go home to, the one that Youth Insights has built. We are now members of the museum’s community and the community of artists it took to make the art presented there. I learned in Youth Insights that without the freedom to create and the space to make mistakes, nothing happens. I practice these disciplines daily.”



I'd say I stunted my own experience—or “overly confident.” Others lacked direction: “If I had a better idea of what I wanted to do in terms of a career, I would have gotten more out of the program. It was a valuable experience, but I was too unfocused to really take advantage of it.” And still others chafed at restrictions—“Why should I feel like I have to be 18 inches away from a wall?”—or perceived the program as too exclusive: “Although I was very grateful for my experience at the museum, I was pretty upset at the institution, how only [a few] had access to this privilege.”

A Youth Insights alum recalled that he didn't even want to return to the Whitney Museum because he thought that he had somehow failed the program:

*Imagine having three years of this great experience and understanding more about yourself and being comfortable, and then you no longer have that, you're no longer a part of that world. And I felt like that. I felt like the worst decision I made was not continuing my fourth year.... It became harder and harder to come back and visit as an alum, because a part of me felt like I failed the program.... I carried with me the burden that I had an opportunity but I didn't fully utilize that opportunity. So even now, I think like that too—there's an alumni event, I want to go, to be supportive, but then I feel like I don't have any really good stories, I'm not where I want to be professionally, I have those doubts.*



# JOURNEY MAPS

## ALUMNI CASE STUDIES

These 12 Journey Maps—created by alumni who had been out of high school 10 years or more—are visual reflections that evoke the individual and collective meaning of intensive teen programs. The research team asked three alumni from each museum to map their paths in relation to art, museums, and careers since finishing the program and to tell us in interviews about its influence. We analyzed these visual and oral case studies to discern common themes and significant examples. The Journey Maps illustrated here, accompanied by short narrative portraits, are a glimpse of the sustained, evolving impact that teen programs have on participants' lives.

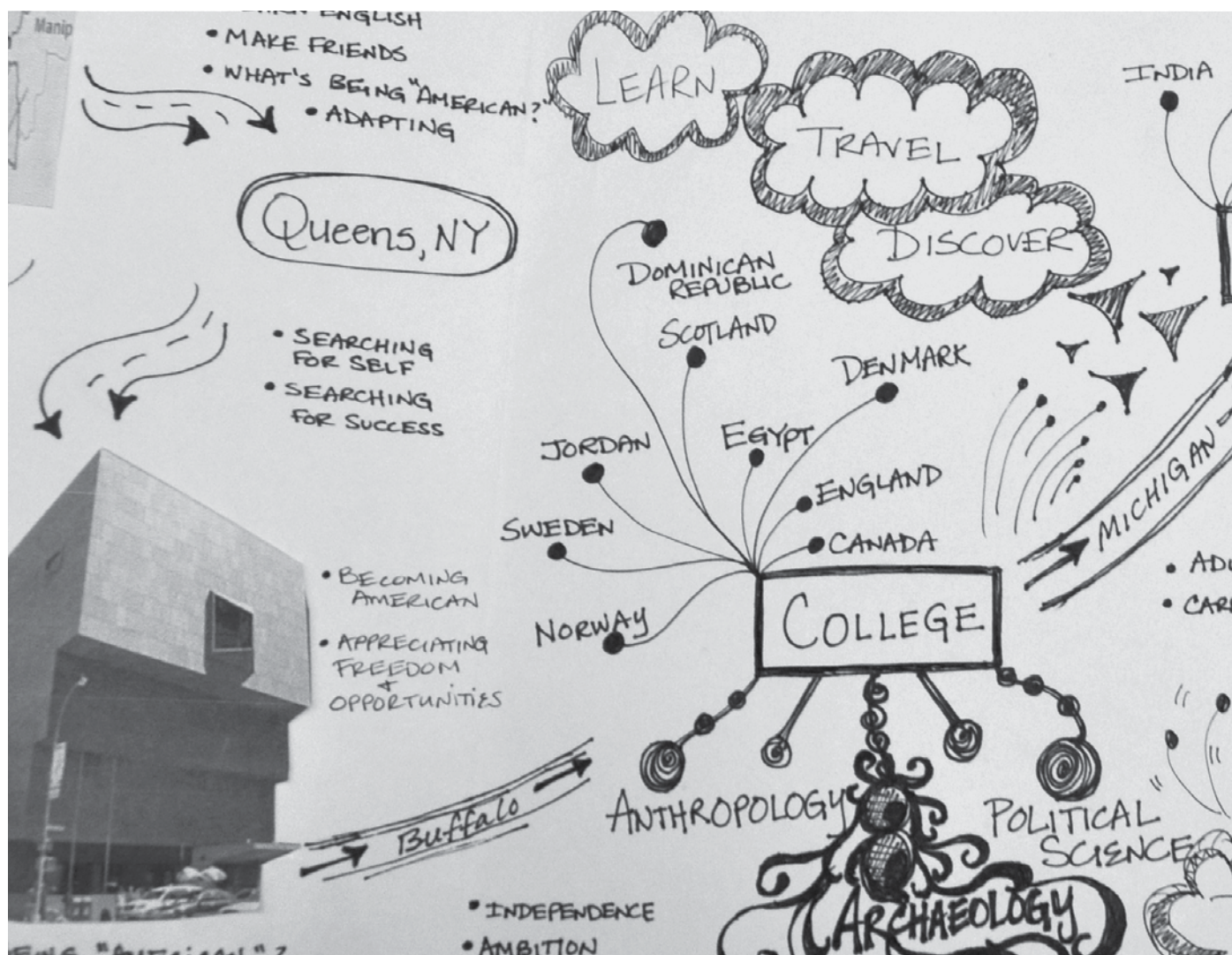


**Shahrina Ankhi-Krol**

Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999–2003

Shahrina Ankhi-Krol immigrated to New York City with her parents at age nine. During elementary and middle school, she struggled with the challenges of cultural assimilation and learning English, as well as with feelings of alienation. Her three years in Youth Insights were a time of personal

exploration, of uncovering meaning in her new identity: What does it mean to be an American? The optimism, opportunity, and sense of freedom that she experienced in the program helped her begin to shape her own answer to that question. She explains her Journey Map as “a map of my American journey.” In college Shahrina followed her childhood dream to study archaeology, but after graduating she chose to pursue the law instead. Today her solo practice specializes in art, fashion, and intellectual property law, a direction influenced by her interaction with art and artists at the Whitney. Her Journey Map shows the links between Youth Insights—where she developed self-confidence, critical thinking skills, and the ability to extrapolate meaning from abstraction—and her education and career path. “My curiosity for art never really went away,” she says. “It has just showed up in different manners throughout my life.”







## Charles Galberth

Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997–2000

Art and uncertainty are intertwined throughout Charles Galberth's life story—from the cartoons he watched as a child and which have inspired his art, through his Youth Insights experience, to the unpredictability of his life after high school, jobs that felt like dead ends, and education that he could not afford, and now in his current art studies

and practice. At unexpected moments, he resolved the chaos of uncertainty through inspiration and creativity. For Charles, artmaking is an essential activity, a life partner.

At age 30 he began pursuing a degree in animation, a goal he had put on hold; today he attends the Art Institute. His Journey Map, called *Reality Check*, is made up of photographs of Charles over the years, an array of his distinctive paintings and drawings, his workspace and brushes, the Whitney's iconic Breuer building, and logos of the Art Institute. While the images are jumbled, his map is a well-considered and balanced artistic creation, suggesting that lives interrupted by personal and professional challenges, like his, can find harmony in art and beauty.

Charles sees art all around him, even in the midst of disorder or mundane routines: “I see the world as a canvas that gets painted every time I walk somewhere.”



### Detail

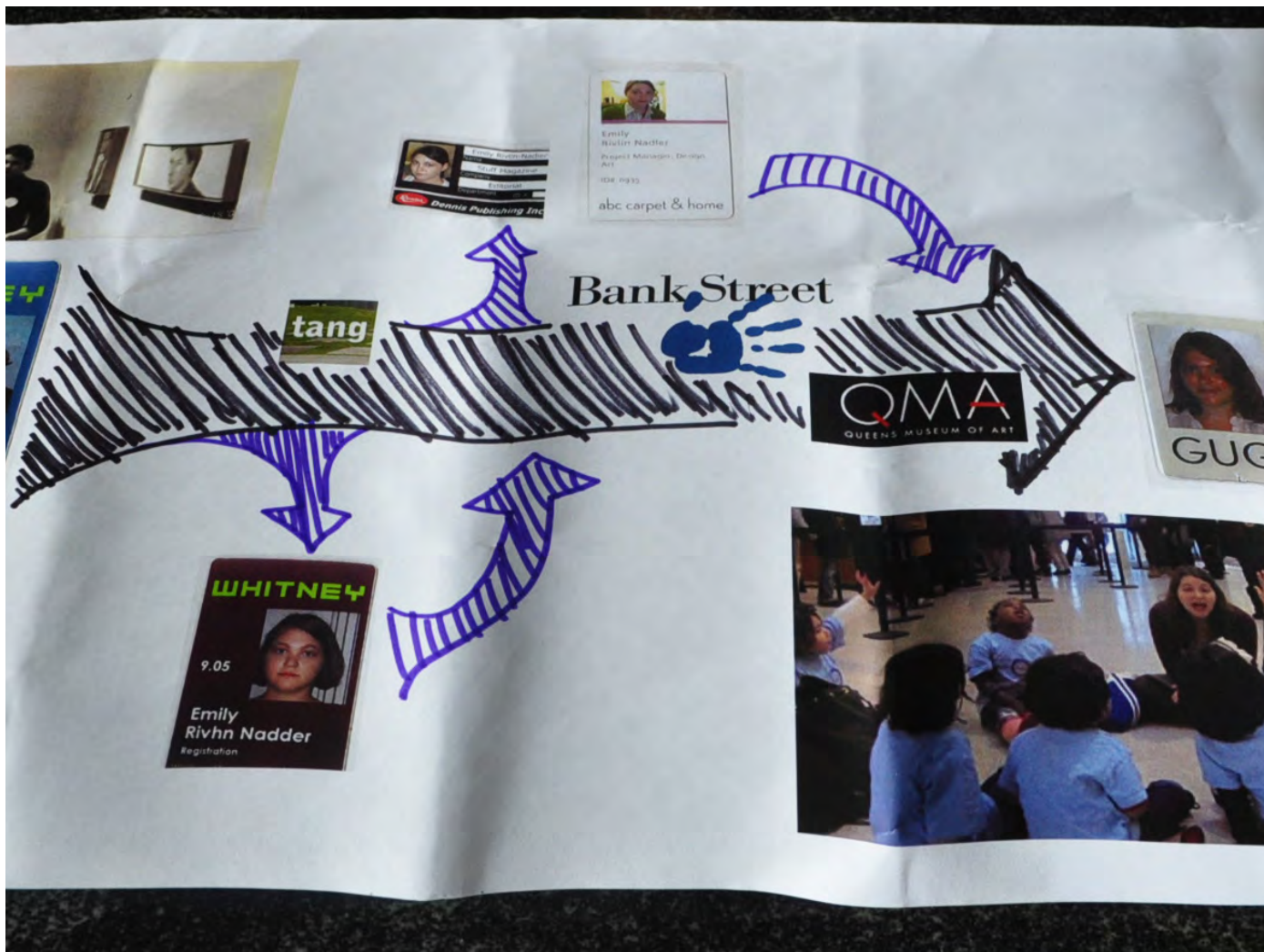


**Emily Rivlin-Nadler**  
Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001–2002

Emily Rivlin-Nadler was interested in art when she began Youth Insights, but museum education was a new concept to her. The notion of a museum as a participatory space inviting the public into conversation captured her interest and inspired the professional path portrayed on her Journey Map. Although the route appears as almost a straight line

to her current position as a museum educator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, she says it did not always feel that way.

After what she describes as a “yearlong intensive in museum education” in Youth Insights, Emily became a studio art major in college. Internships, represented by images on her map, strengthened her aspiration to connect people and museums but sometimes made her wonder whether museums were focused too closely on objects, to the detriment of their relationship with visitors. During a career detour into graphic design, she remembered her enthusiasm for engaging people in art. She decided to become an agent of change in museums, reaching out and helping museumgoers “become a part of the conversation.” Youth Insights, she says, “definitely changed my course in terms of my relationship to museums and my ultimate career.”







### Leila Darabi

Walker Art Center, 1996–1997

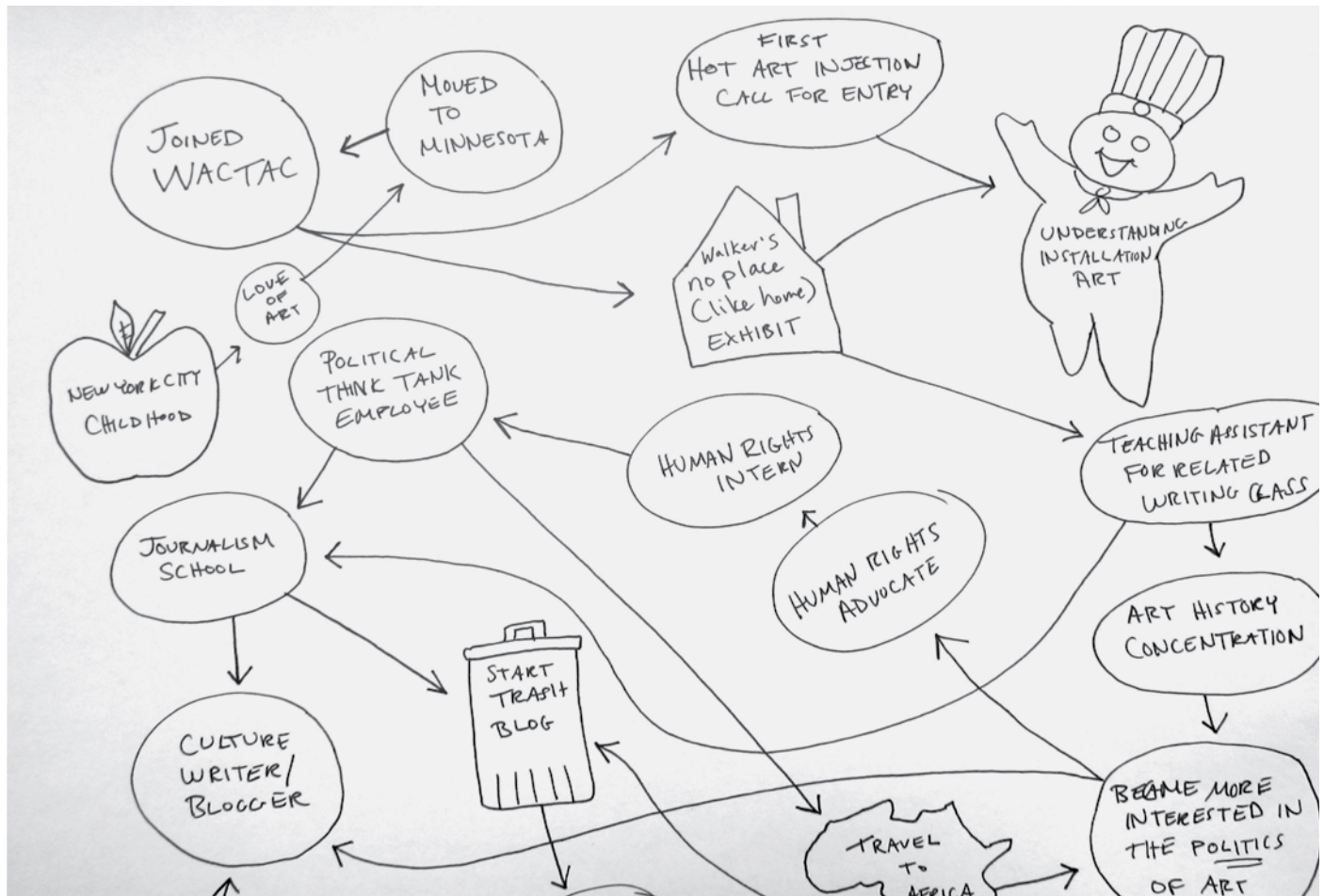
Leila Darabi describes her Journey Map as “the intersection of art, politics, and storytelling.” The connecting lines represent the links that she has forged among her disparate interests and decipher hidden relationships in the world.

Leila loves “chasing those chains and those stories and those connections,” blending art, writing, community, and politics in a professional arc that has led to her current work as director of global partnerships for the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

WACTAC was a source of revelation and affirmation for Leila. While helping to develop the museum's first teen art show, her “eye-opening” discovery of installation art unfolded, especially when she saw a site-specific mural in which graffiti artists had transformed a knot in a warehouse wall into the prominent navel of the Pillsbury doughboy.

The doughboy appears in her Journey Map, arms outstretched, with “understanding installation art” scrawled across his belly. The Walker also nurtured her emerging passion for writing. She recalls that a post-WACTAC teaching assistant job for an art criticism class during the exhibition *No Place (Like Home)* strengthened her writing and critical thinking skills.

Leila describes the Walker as a “house of ideas” where she began to discern the links that she illustrates in her Journey Map. The instinct to create and follow those links has sparked endeavors and opened doors throughout Leila's career—and it continues to drive her work today.



Detail

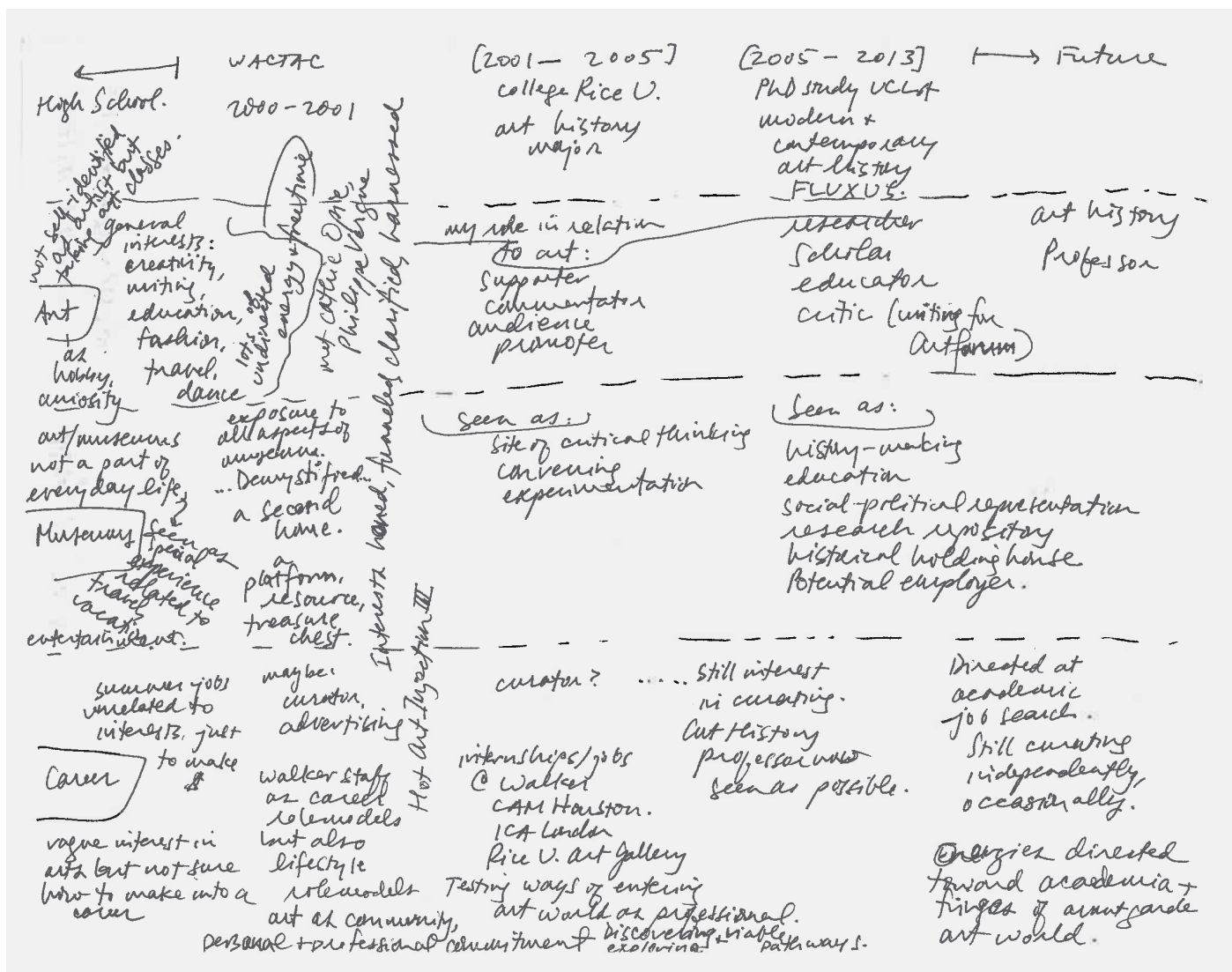


**Natilee Harren**  
Walker Art Center, 2000–2001

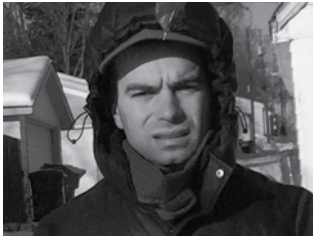
As a high school student, Natilee Harren already had an interest in art—looking at it, creating it, and appreciating it. She joined WACTAC as an extracurricular activity, but the experience turned into much more. Organizing the exhibition *Hot Art Injection* with her peers changed her life

by revealing career opportunities in the museum world that she had never imagined. She remembers thinking, “I want to do more stuff like this.”

Natilee's Journey Map is a handwritten narrative of her emerging career in art, an ambition she attributes entirely to the practical direction and personal confidence WACTAC gave her. In the “college” section, she notes her decision to study art history and get a PhD in modern and contemporary art. Along the way, curators she had met at the Walker wrote letters of recommendation or introduced her to professional contacts. “I always felt like they were invested in my future,” she recalls. Today she is assistant professor of contemporary art history and creative studies at the University of Houston. Museums and the world of art, she says, will always feel like home.





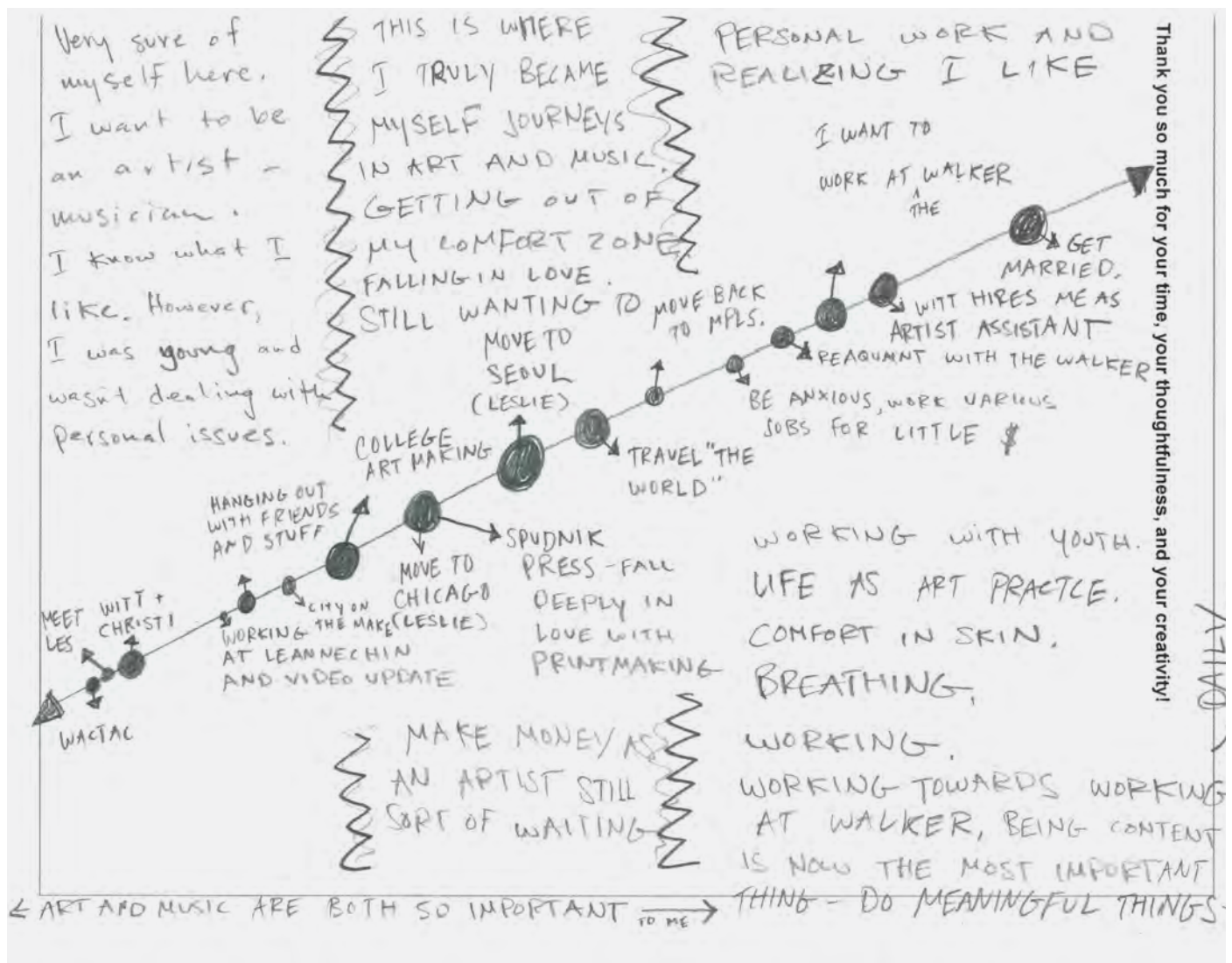


### Mischa Kegan

Walker Art Center, 2001–2003

As a high school student, Mischa Kegan wanted to be a professional artist. But his artistic journey began in earnest in WACTAC, where he began to comprehend art as a living process rather than simply a physical product. Working

alongside artists in residence at the Walker, he felt enlightened by these “creative beacons,” who, he realized, really are “people just like us.” Since WACTAC he has studied art in college, traveled to South Korea to teach English, and returned to the Walker to continue working with teens, this time as teen programs coordinator. He approaches life as an “artistic practice,” making drawings and paintings in the traditional sense while committing himself to teaching with an artist’s mindset. WACTAC’s profound impact on Mischa includes a transformed perception of museums and what they mean to him. For a decade he has continued his relationships with the Walker and those he met during the program; now, he says, “museums anywhere in the world can feel like home.” “I am what I set out to be,” Mischa concludes, “but it’s very different than I imagined.”





**Marisa Miller**

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 1999–2000

Marisa Miller made her three-dimensional Journey Map to capture the “spirit of the places” where she has interacted with art since her year with the CAMH Teen Council.

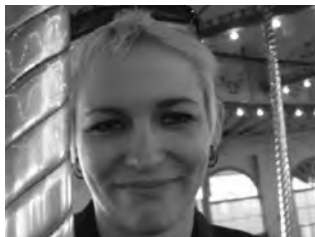
Part abstract sculpture, part topographical map, it follows her through a college education spread across two majors (culminating in an architecture degree), three universities, and four major cities. In her personal and professional lives today, she creates music, constructs 3-D models, hosts

an art criticism group that she cofounded, maintains her studio, and makes plans to start her own business. Her travels and experiences are represented on the map by rough-hewn cities that sprout up, connected by a multitude of circulating swirls and shapes denoting museums where she has been drawn into cultural conversations

As a high school student, Marisa was working in the CAMH gift shop when a staff member invited her to join the Teen Council. She recalls that year as great fun but, more important, as a confidence-building experience that revealed museums to be less mysterious, more accessible places than she had thought. A self-described introvert, she points to the deep influence of the program’s “formative collaborative experiences”—curating an exhibition, talking about and critiquing works of art, planning events, building community. Her journey has been one of growing self-assurance, not just about her sense of belonging in museums and other spaces but about her own creative ideas and energies.





**Shablis Kinsella**

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2000–2002

A backbeat of creativity pulses through Shablis Kinsella's life. Her impressionistic Journey Map—which she calls “an emotional colorscape”—represents the recent years of her life, with shapes signifying inspirational moments that emerge from this constant invention. During what she calls her “nebulous” teenage years, these moments are associated with the CAMH Teen Council:

seeing the artist and musician Patti Smith, enjoying an overnight lock-in event, and developing *Faux, Foe, Pho*, a teen-organized exhibition of work by Houston high school students. Shablis lived down the street from CAMH and had always felt at home there. But Teen Council added a social, participatory dimension to that relationship, an encouraging experience for someone who considered herself an introvert. As she learned more about the museum's behind-the-scenes functions and how they interconnect, she began to see it as a “living, breathing building.”

Making art was an outlet for Shablis during a challenging time in her life, and the CAMH experience gave her the confidence to enter a juried show. Her entry was a prizewinner. Today her output has slowed as work and family take precedence, but her artistic instinct, love of museums, and interest in the arts and culture remain. The backbeat of creativity continues.

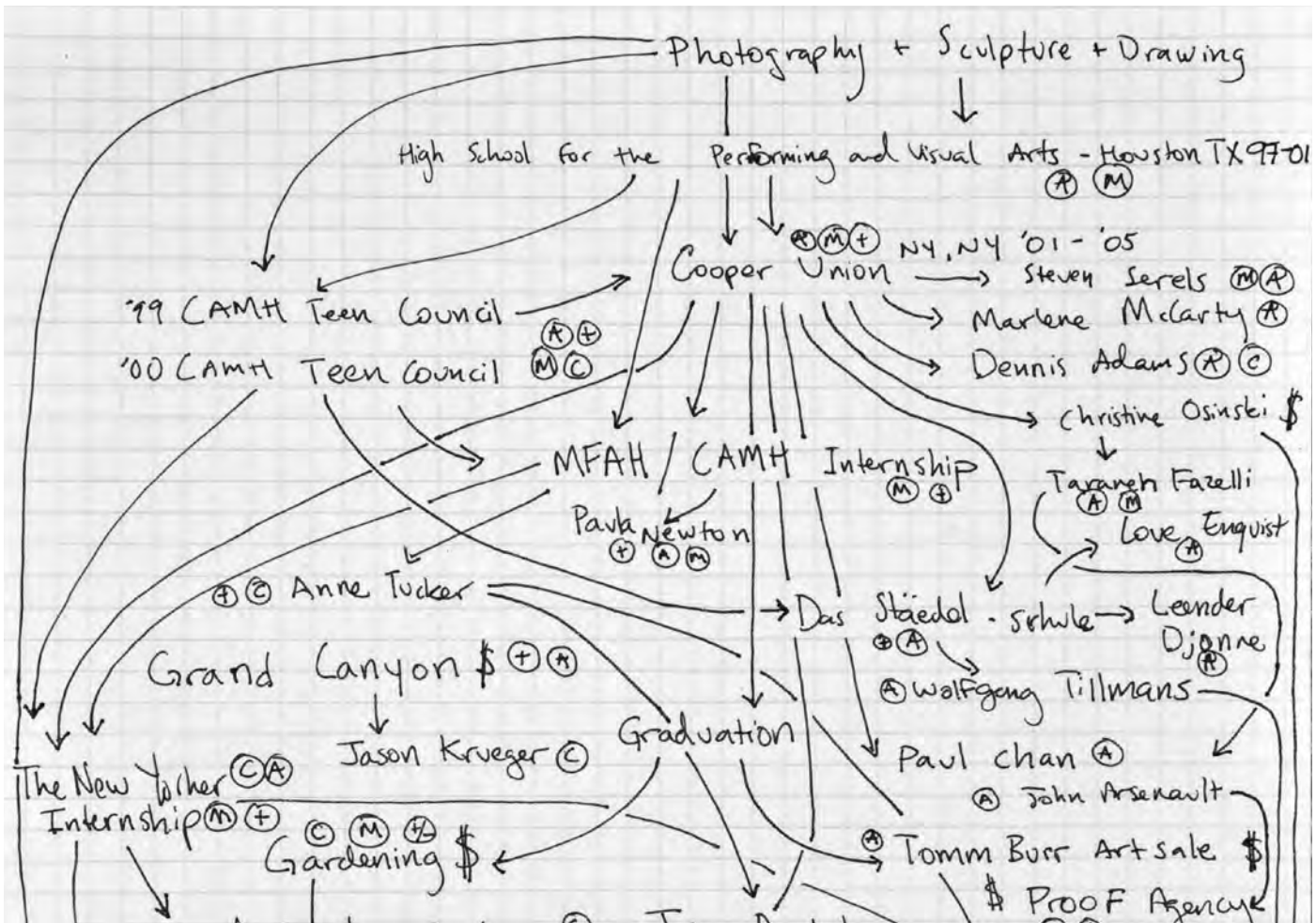




## Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 1999–2001

more. So he took a break from his art studies to work as a chef in Grand Canyon National Park—the first work he'd done that felt “real.”

Some years later, seeking to reconnect with that feeling, Corey quit his job as photo editor at *Teen Vogue* and moved to rural Tennessee with his partner to live off the land. Now he farms and takes photographs, combining his desires to create art for art's sake and to do work with a more tangible, practical impact. He cherishes his training in art theory and critical thinking for helping him find ways to immerse himself in a moment while contemplating the implications of what he is doing. That application of artistic principles to everyday life is something he learned at CAMH. Before, he remembers, he had always “put art on a pedestal”; the teen program “made art human.” He doesn’t rule out returning to art professionally. For now, however, he applies his creative, critical lens to working the land, making art that’s human in the hills of Tennessee.







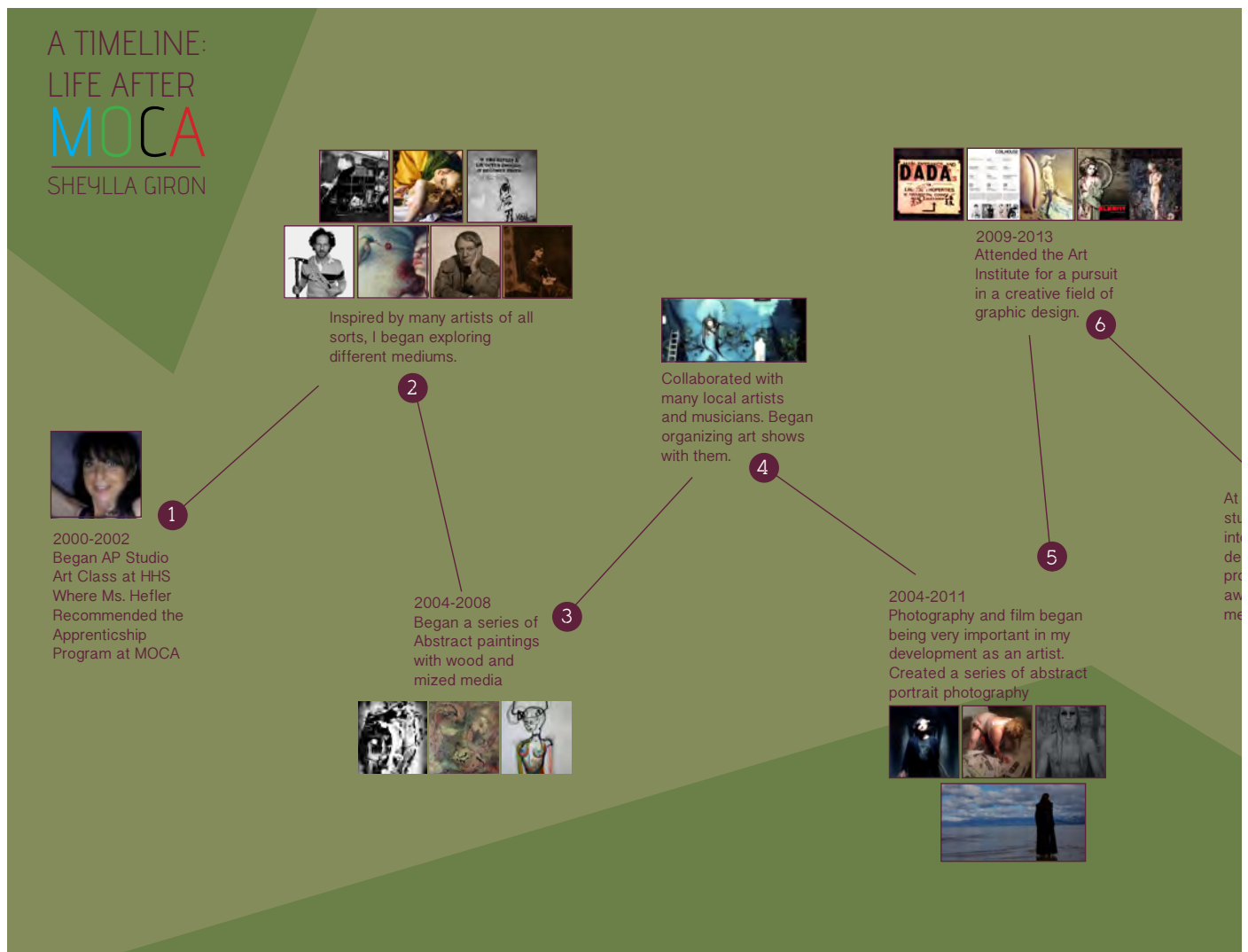
### Sheylla Giron

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,  
2000–2001

MOCA is the first stop on Sheylla Giron's Journey Map. She emerged from the program with a path and a purpose, inspired by her intimate experiences with abstract art in the galleries after the museum closed. For the first time

in her life, she found herself face to face with art, and in those moments the “cluttered mess” of her life fell away. Sheylla grew up with limited resources—artistic, educational, and emotional—and little support for her determination to become an artist. Being around so many “friendly, open, creative people with similar interests” in the MOCA program strengthened her resolve. Working behind the scenes turned museums from “the place you go if you have to” into an integral part of her life.

Sheylla's Journey Map reflects her identity as a trailblazer, its lines communicating movement and change. As a graphic designer, she fuses fine art with her work to create her own unique hybrid; in that spirit, she created her map using design software. A decade after leaving the program, her passion and conviction are evident—nurtured and allowed to flourish during her time at MOCA.





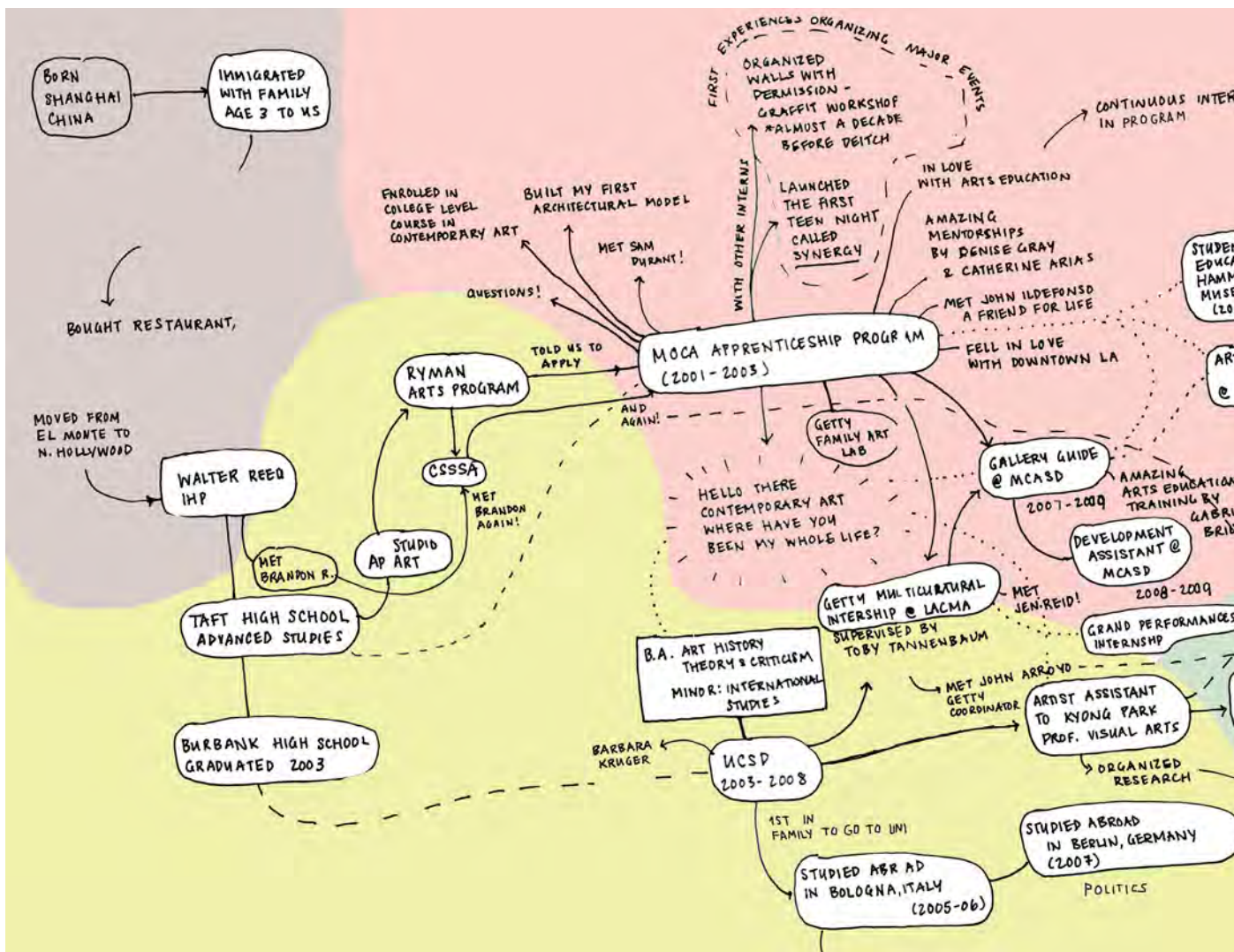
## Jia Gu

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,  
2001–2003

Jia Gu embraces her responsibility to share what MOCA's teen program gave her: an enthusiasm for museums and a deep interest in art and its connection to social and public issues. She had never visited museums before, but the

program demystified museum culture and turned them into “destination points” where today she finds a sense of place. Meeting artists dedicated to creating work with a social message was especially inspiring. “Art wouldn’t be as important [to me] without MOCA,” she says.

Jia calls her Journey Map “an attempt to map a multidisciplinary trajectory from art to architecture with MOCA’s Apprenticeship Program as a central point.” People, projects, and areas of study all branch out from her time in the program. As an undergraduate she studied contemporary art, and her growing interest in art as social practice led her to graduate studies in architecture and projects around the world. As she considers her future, the blend of interests and experiences represented in her map form a compelling picture, anchored by the MOCA teen program.






**Luis Martin**

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,  
1997–1998

Luis Martin's passion for art began as a child growing up in Los Angeles, when he visited a museum with his aunt and saw his own Mexican heritage reflected in Frida Kahlo's paintings. Art became a lifesaving bright spot in a childhood he describes as "kind of ominous and dark." Later, in

MOCA's teen program, his artistic identity blossomed. He spent four years at the museum, and it has been an enduring personal and professional influence—"something that I'll always go back to."

Luis's Journey Map, titled *Ex Machina Compass*, is a collage of images that start at the top center with MOCA, where he found access to a professional network that otherwise would have been closed to him. When he moved to New York at 19, Luis used that network to find employment. In his first job, at El Museo del Barrio, he designed a program for high school students that gave them the same freedom and access he had had at MOCA. Now a practicing artist—he calls himself an "art engineer"—Luis constantly circles back to the teen program's inclusive philosophy. He acts as a compass himself, providing direction and guidance to others.



Detail



Art and the art world are demystified for teens at the Walker Art Center.









# CHANGING MUSEUMS

“With new audiences comes a new responsibility to make the museum an accessible and welcoming environment for those with limited experience with modern and contemporary art. . . . So Teen Council helps keep us accountable to broader publics.”

—Bill Arning, Director, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston

Leaders and senior staff of the four museums share Bill Arning's view of the broad impact of intensive teen engagement. Designed in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration, these programs benefit not just teen participants and their staff mentors but ultimately the museum's fundamental culture and its broader community. "Because of Teen Council," Arning said, "CAMH staff is constantly renewing its commitment to reach audiences outside of those that already care about contemporary art."

To learn about the influence of teen programs on their host institutions, we interviewed current museum directors, directors at the time the programs began, and at least one staff member with institutional memory of the program from each museum. We asked them to reflect on the program's history and its impact on the museum, its community, and the wider museum field. We were also curious about the reasons for each program's longevity.

We found that these leaders and senior staff held their teen programs in very high regard, felt that teens represent a natural audience for contemporary art, and observed a positive influence among staff. They believed that giving teens a voice, the autonomy to create programs for their peers, and the freedom to experiment translated into a positive impact on museum culture, and they asserted that keeping the programs small intensified that impact. And in perhaps the most intriguing commentary on the programs' value, they perceived a sustained influence on the way their museums seek and welcome diverse new audiences for contemporary art.

### **Fresh Perspectives**

Almost universally, the high-level staff interviewed for this study recognized that teens brought distinctive perspectives to the museum. By giving teens a platform and a voice within the institution, these programs take advantage of their energy, ideas, and creative spirit. "It opened us up to a new point of view that wasn't our own," explained Marti Mayo, former director of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.

Staff perceived that the program remained vital and current from year to year as a result of the teens' agency and involvement, and the larger museum benefited as well. Adam D. Weinberg, the Alice Pratt Brown Director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, noted that "the Whitney is energized. . . . [Youth Insights] keeps it energetic and relevant and connected to a younger generation. And it helps raise relevant questions." Jeremy Strick, former director of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, echoed this sentiment: "MOCA's staff is being consistently energized, given a dose of enthusiasm which I think is important and sustaining."

### **By Teens, For Teens**

A defining element of intensive teen engagement is sharing power in the creation of programs and events. Teens develop and present (better than adults can) programming that appeals to other teens and generates an increase in youth attendance and engagement. They are active ambassadors and community builders among other youth, not just recipients of services developed by museum staff. In every case, programming initiated and delivered by teens in collaboration with staff attracted hundreds or even thousands of teens to the museum each year, often expanding its reach in diverse or underserved communities. Olga Viso, the Walker Art Center's director, believes that this programming contributed to a shift in public perceptions: "Before the Teen Council, I don't think teens thought the Walker was a place for them."

There is a compelling difference between programs for teens and programs by teens. Mayo reflected on the unique value of teen-generated programming: "You and I can sit here and come up with 800 different programs that we think are going to appeal to adolescents, and I will guarantee you that in 799 cases, we would be dead wrong. But they hit it every time." From a teen fashion show that drew hundreds of attendees during its inaugural presentation, to a crowd-generated artwork that invited visitors to respond to the September 11, 2001, attacks by embellishing simple wooden blocks, the events they developed were unique. Mayo recalled: "It was the best 9/11 show I ever saw. . . . I would never have thought of that in a million years. You would have had to be an adolescent to think of that. And it was a magic program."

### **Energetic Risk Taking**

Teens push the museum to be innovative, experimental, and open to risk. The successful application of a by-teens, for-teens model requires a genuine commitment to experimentation, institutional support for new forms of programming, and trust. At times, participants proposed programs or made statements that aggressively questioned the status quo and tested boundaries, a tendency that could cause discomfort and anxiety among staff. Mayo recalled being approached by the museum's education team about an upcoming teen event that involved breakdancing in the galleries; they told her, "We promise you the art will be safe, we'll have eight guards around, don't worry. But you're going to have a heart attack if you come, so just stay home." Mayo did, and the art survived.

Directors found that these tensions, while challenging, could benefit the museum by helping to foster a culture of innovation. Weinberg explained that teens "test what we're able to do, programmatically and all that. They serve as a lightning rod for the institution in the best way. And so I think it's critical to have a program like Youth Insights. . . .





Teens in the Whitney's Youth Insights program have the opportunity to meet and work closely with contemporary artists, exploring new forms of creative practice and self-expression in a supportive environment.

It's almost like an incubator for other kinds of programs." While there were certainly instances when participants' suggestions were not implemented for reasons of safety, cost, or propriety, the trust placed in these young people and their ideas was significant. Alumni's and staff members' responses show that recognizing the value of teens and their ideas contributes to lasting impacts for program participants while at the same time pushing museum professionals to become more flexible. Viso described this phenomenon:

*Because of the Walker Teen Arts Council, the museum staff is much more open to experimentation—willing to test different institutional comfort levels in order to be relevant to our audiences as they change, shift, evolve, and develop. It makes us more humble. . . . It's been an evolution for the rest of the staff to be that supportive. . . . The guards in the galleries have to be a little more relaxed about those experiments; the curators need to be a little more generous. . . . I think, over time, there's been a building of trust and people have seen that those experiments have been really fruitful.*

Mayo also noted this shift in the CAMH staff: "We learned how to be a little loose, a little less museum staff-like."

One former teen council member who has gone on to pursue a career in museums and now develops programs at another institution said that he has carried this spirit of experimentation forward: "I feel like my time on the council has made me much more of a risk taker at my museum. When we are thinking of ideas to prototype, I am really not afraid of trying anything because I have a strong background to pull from."

### **Small Numbers, Big Impact**

Another shared feature of all of the programs assessed in this study is that they serve a small number of participants intensively over an extended period of time and are both staff- and resource-intensive. Museum leaders explained the need to keep programs small and were willing to defend their figures internally and externally. "You had to be devoted to a small number of people having a larger

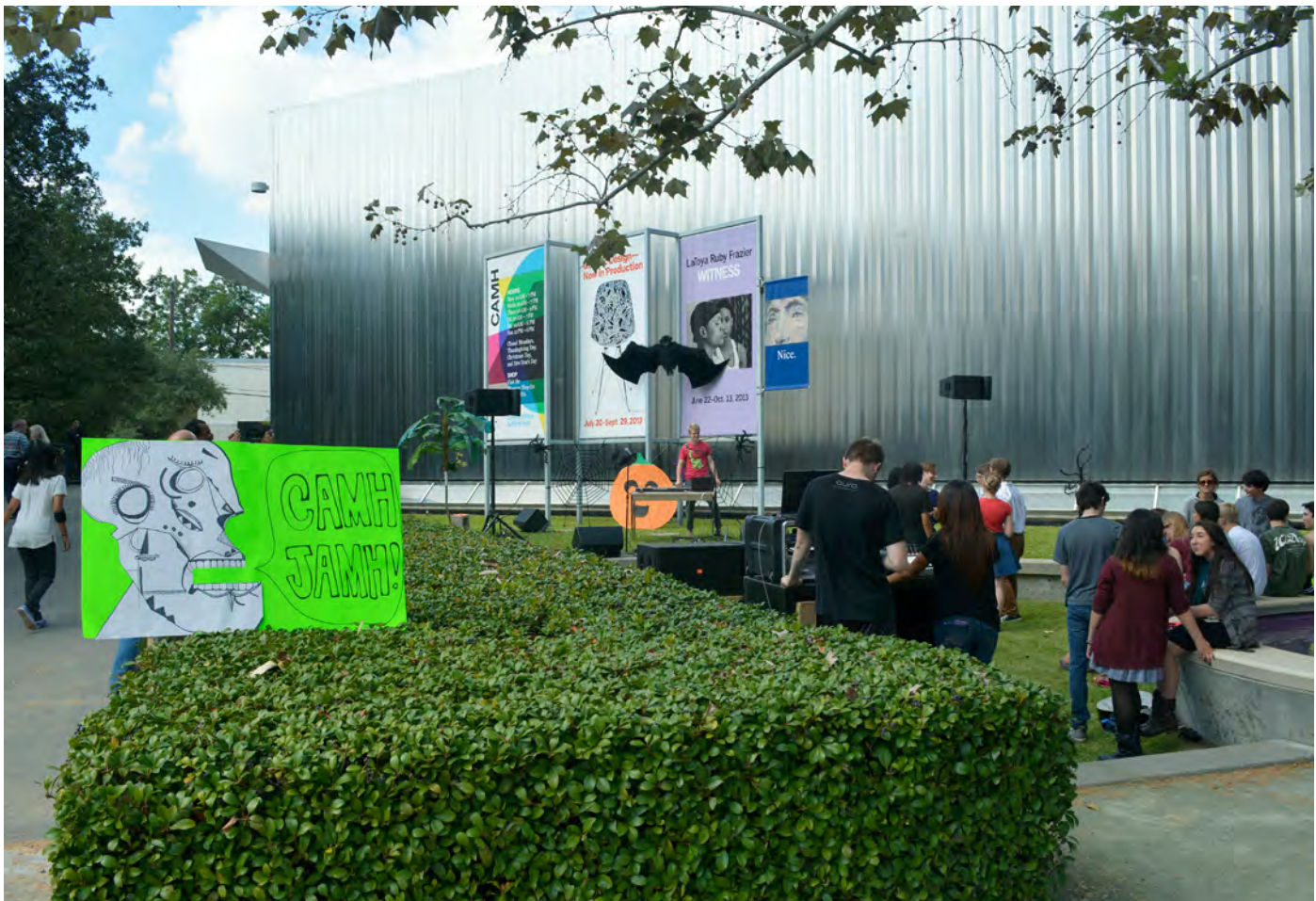
impact,” said Kathy Halbreich, former director of the Walker Art Center. “But I don’t think that’s a downside. I think it’s an incredible lesson. But it was something I had to repeat to sponsors like foundations: How can we legitimize funding so few people at such a high level?” Vasundhara Prabhu, who oversaw the launch of the MOCA teen program, agreed: “It’s a struggle in that it’s a small number of people and it’s very staff-intensive, so in that sense you have to fight for why this program is important to the museum, . . . but indirectly it affects a lot of people.”

One attempt at program expansion, reflecting the understandable desire to serve more young people, did not yield positive results in practice. At CAMH, after several years of successful operation, the Teen Council was enlarged and the model shifted to serve more teens. As director Arning explained, “They decided since it was a successful program to expand it. . . . I think they tripled the amount of students and the amount of resources devoted to it. And it started failing. And it turns out that the

group had to be small enough so they all knew each other’s names and relied on each other, and it didn’t work as a larger program.”

### Positive Perceptions of Teens

While some staff may have held stereotypical negative views of adolescents before the introduction of an intensive teen program, having an engaged group of young people working productively alongside staff helped change these perceptions. Our research reveals that staff attitudes toward teen audiences are transformed and influence attitudes toward audiences in general. “Museum staff, I think, learned a lot,” Prabhu reflected. Some “were afraid of teenagers, certainly afraid of teenagers of color. They put teenagers in a box the way the media put teenagers in a box.” Those attitudes shifted among staff who worked with teens. “That was a very positive thing for our museum’s culture,” she noted. Just as teens in the programs no longer found museums to be closed off, intimidating, uncomfortable



The annual Teen Music Festival at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston requires intensive collaboration, immersing Teen Council members in confidence-building work.



spaces after their participation, museum staff no longer found teens to be threatening, disengaged, potentially rebellious visitors.

The experience of working closely with teens and seeing what they were capable of made staff members more willing to be open to audience perspectives in general. “It helps to keep the Whitney staff on their toes,” Weinberg observed, “and not take things for granted, and question their own assumptions, and be responsive to teens and to their needs, which are changing all the time.” Halbreich agreed: “I think the museum staff in working with the Teen Arts Council learned to listen better.” Viso characterized the teen council as a model for audience engagement and co-creation of programming: “It not only materially shapes how we reach out to teen audiences, but it also has informed . . . how we approach all audiences. The museum field has benefited greatly from this unique model that understands how being a partner with your audiences can lead to a much more enriching engagement with your audiences—involved with instead of just serving.”

### Diverse New Audiences

Museum staff, leaders, and program alumni perceived that teen programs are effective in helping to make the institution a more welcoming place and cultivate broader audiences for contemporary art. In fact, these programs show museums how to do it. Halbreich saw this outreach in action as part of the program’s original *raison d’être*: “I think there was an ethical imperative, which was to think very hard about who were the people that museums didn’t routinely talk to.” As Arning explained, “If you have

16-year-olds bringing in their grandparents, which is a common experience, it helps, . . . and then they tell other people in their social networks about it. In terms of broadening our public, I think Teen Council is crucial.” He added, “We are aware that the people who come in because they know about the Teen Council might have never seen contemporary art before. It reminds us that we have to work harder . . . to make things that might be intimidating for more diverse publics approachable.”

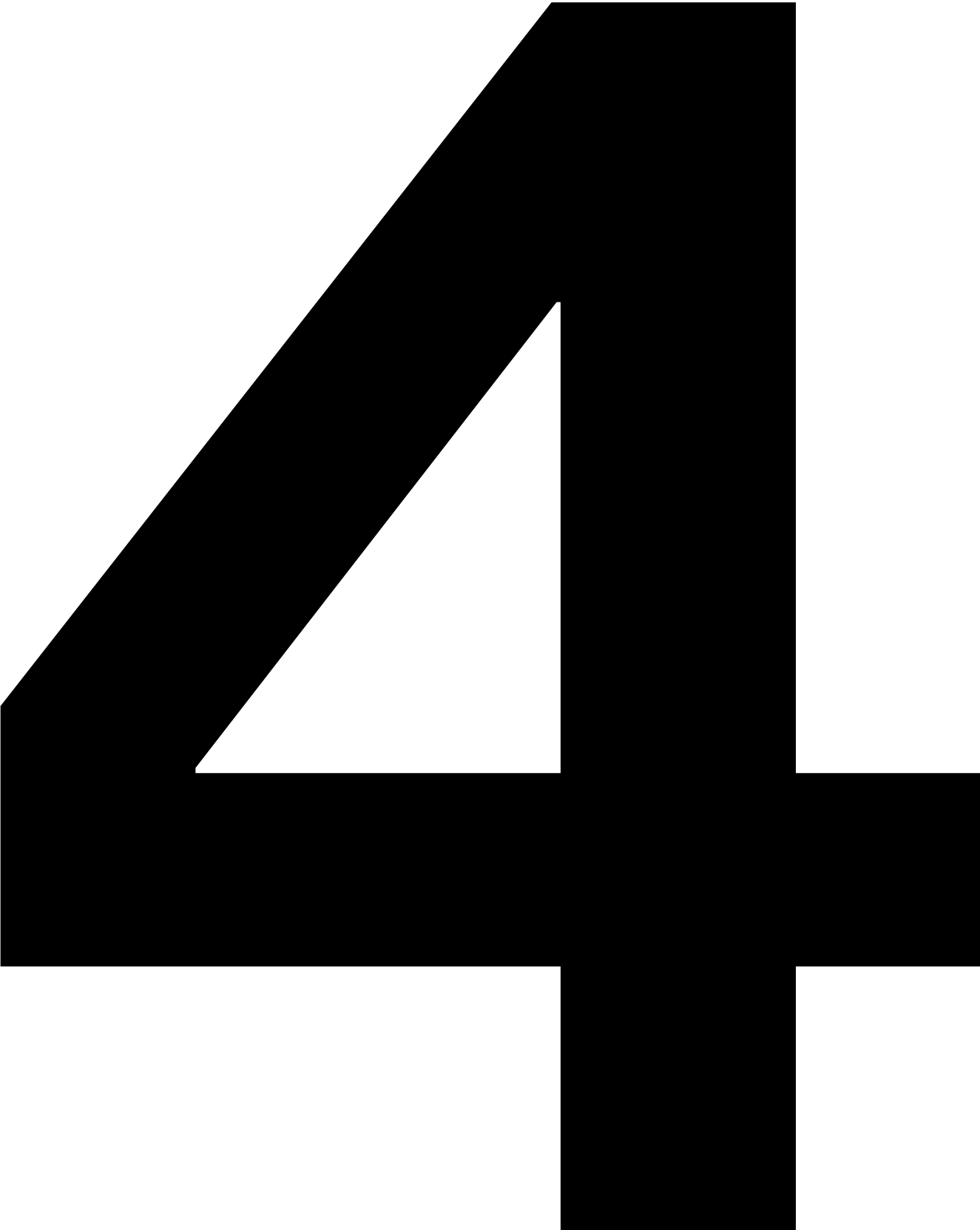
This echoes the spirit that inspired the launch of these programs nearly 20 years ago: Perhaps new audiences for contemporary art can make meaningful connections and rich interpretations based on natural affinities and personal experience rather than on the insider knowledge commonly thought to be a requirement for engagement with avant-garde art forms. David Ross, who was director of the Whitney when the teen program began, reflected on this philosophy:

*The overall design of the program was based on the notion that students today bring their own experience of the world to looking at art. And they need to understand that their experience of the world and of themselves in it—the growing understanding of who they are—is sufficient to provide them with a valuable insight about art. That the insight that they would have, would be, first of all, relevant to their lives and, second of all, no less important than the insight of somebody who comes at the discussion or the interpretation of art from a more academic perspective. . . . It’s not about the museum; it’s not about their school; it’s about learning about themselves.*



### Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot

**Chanelle Frazier** works with high school students in an organization that inspires young women to be civic and political leaders. Her experiences at CAMH have influenced her life decisions and given her confidence to think in unconventional ways. “Pictures of sunsets are seemingly generic, but I don’t really care. This is an intersection I often passed through after I left the museum. Understanding that imagery is loaded with potential as well as meaning was one of the things I learned first and foremost at CAMH.”





# SHAPING OUR PRACTICE

“The museum field, like the Walker staff, learned that underserved audiences may, with proper and heartfelt welcome, become a devoted public.”

—Kathy Halbreich, former Director, Walker Art Center



A Walker Art Center Teen Art Council member gives a tour during the annual Student Open House, a lively evening of art, music, dancing, and performance designed by teens, for teens.





**Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot**

**John Ildelfonso** says his MOCA apprenticeship built his confidence as an artist and art educator. Today he is dedicated to instilling the same passion and dedication in the young people he teaches, like the Los Angeles high school student shown here. “Think big! An artist only develops by learning to take risks. At the beginning of the school year, most of my students dare not draw or paint on a sheet of paper larger than 8 1/2 by 11 inches. This is where I come in with positive encouragement and clear expectations: All students will paint on a 4-by-5-foot canvas that they build themselves. During my apprenticeship at MOCA I was encouraged to take risks and learn from the experiences.”



For museum practitioners, this study affirms that programs for engaging teens have great value both in the moment and for the future. Inherent in the findings is a challenge to refine, focus, and strengthen teen programs across the museum field. As Kathy Halbreich and other museum leaders observed, we gleaned an unexpected but highly significant observation from our research: Teens can teach the museum how to work with other audiences. The underlying design and engagement principles of these programs—focusing on relationships rather than visits, giving people access to the inside workings of the museum—not only apply to teens but are also useful principles when working with underserved and diverse audiences.

This chapter identifies six areas with promising implications for shaping this view of museum practice: linking youth development to the museum's role in serving the public good; advocating for the big impact of small-scale programs; addressing logistical and perceptual barriers to access; capitalizing on teens' natural potential to relate to contemporary art; engaging more diverse audiences in new ways; and exploring varied research principles and practices.

**Youth Development and Public Value**

Seen through the lens of positive youth development, there is potential public value in intensive teen programs and the long-term contributions that a museum can make. The notion of public value relates to the role of museums in promoting civic engagement, generating social capital, and generally serving the public good. Museums do not speak

this language easily, but it is a powerful one to learn. Mary Ellen Munley, lead research advisor for this study, explains that in contrast with the business sector and the public sector, “the social sector defines its aim and outcomes in terms of what is good for all. Success is demonstrated by creation of public value.”<sup>10</sup> Intensive teen programs have great public value because of their enduring impact on participants, which has been well documented in this study. Alumni spread that impact through their communities to the students they teach, their families, their peers, and the audiences for the programs they develop. The arts and museums have become important parts of their lives. Many have created similar youth development opportunities for others. They value community, collaboration, and diversity, and they translate their program experiences into community work that influences others. All of this contributes to building social capital, which connects people working together for common purposes.

**Depth and Continuity as Success Indicators**

The compelling quantitative and qualitative evidence documented in this report, including the strong testimonials from teens and staff, shows that success is measured not in large numbers but in depth of experience and widespread, sustained impact. Even one individual who has benefited from a small museum program can in turn affect many people and communities throughout a lifetime. Making the case for such small-scale programs to museum management, boards, and funders can be challenging unless the language for articulating success does justice to the lasting significance for alumni, the museum,



and the wider community. Nonprofits in general—and their communities and funders—tend to focus on indicators such as numbers served or level of innovation in program design and content. But because they are in a constant state of renewal, tested models like these teen engagement programs have inventiveness and originality built in, measured in the diversity of participants and the depth and impact of the experiences offered. Innovation stems from the continual infusion of fresh perspectives from each year's new group of teens. It also grows from the programs they co-create and the peer audiences they welcome—in many cases, audiences previously underserved by the museum.

### **A Welcoming Culture That Overcomes Barriers to Access**

Through recruiting and engaging youth from underserved backgrounds, it became evident that some teens faced obstacles to participation that were both logistical and perceptual. This realization helped shape certain policies and features of the four museums' program models. A structure and culture that provide physical space, access to the people, tools, and skills needed to succeed, and the opportunity to contribute to decisions go a long way toward welcoming teens into the museum. Creating such an environment can be challenging and requires the cooperation of leadership and staff throughout the institution.



### **Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot**

Photographer, painter, and writer **Erica Qualy** honed her observational skills in the Walker Art Center's teen program. She offers *Basketball Star of David* as an example. "This is a photograph of a basketball goal with a chain-link net, taken from below, at a playground outside a church. WACTAC helped me to have an eye for composition and an appreciation for simplicity in art."

We learned that the logistics of committing to a structured out-of-school program with serious expectations can be challenging for some teens. Getting there on time, attending regularly, and balancing multiple commitments can be difficult or even impossible. Teens with limited resources may work after school or contribute in other ways to supporting their households—by caring for younger siblings, for example. In all four programs, the staff designed financial incentives that would help ease the burden of involvement. Students were paid during their time in the program. While financial compensation helped students feel that their work was important and valued, without it some teens would not have been able to participate. Similarly, providing food and supporting transportation costs also helped reduce financial obstacles. Teens' immigration status is one barrier that is difficult to resolve. The fact that participants are paid means that legal status must be a consideration in the selection process, ruling out undocumented immigrant youth unless eligibility for work can be established. Perceptual barriers are more subtle but no less challenging.

Some alumni recalled that they had been fearful of trying something new with peers they did not know in an institutional structure they found unfamiliar and even intimidating. Their responses, however, suggest that such barriers fall away when teens are asked to do authentic work, feel heard by peers and adults, and discover the freedom to explore and take risks. Luis Martin summed up the question of access in this way:

*The experience for me as a whole was about accessibility. As a teen I was dealing with issues at home and at school. At MOCA I was given an opportunity and empowerment to reach into myself and develop my voice and vision in very tangible ways. I was able to meet creative people and work with artists who were interested in listening to what I had to say. A very important and impactful element for me as a Latino was to see adult Latinos working at MOCA in the arts. Prior to the program, my perception of my "people" was what was dictated by the media and the people I saw in my neighborhood and school.*



Whitney Youth Insights teens discuss their photographs with artist Fred Wilson.



### **A Natural Connection to Contemporary Art**

As staff at every institution noted, teens seem developmentally primed to relate to the sometimes transgressive and often experimental nature of contemporary art. Youth are experimenting with identity, self-expression, and authenticity. Contemporary art is an ideal teacher and partner because it provides a context for challenging convention, approaching the unknown, asking questions, and searching for meaning. In the process, teens build skills they will go on to use in other aspects of their lives.

These programs introduce students to new and unfamiliar art forms through inquiry-based gallery discussions, meetings with artists and museum staff, art making, and research and writing activities. Alumni reported that they were inspired to create or intensify their own work, found career and creative role models, and identified with the energy that emanates from the creative process. Most said they discovered that their notions of art were transformed; some found contemporary art to be uniquely engaging. “WACTAC influenced the way in which I talk about art, the way in which I am open to my mind being changed about art, and the way in which I relate to art on a personal level,” one participant said.

### **Diversity and Engagement**

Alumni and staff alike considered diversity one of the most important features of the program, and understandings of diversity in the four museums changed over time. Museums in general tend to think of a diverse audience as one that includes people who do not typically participate, and work with these audiences involves targeted programs. In their early years, the four teen programs engaged low-income, at-risk, underserved youth, and primarily youth of color. But as their efforts became more established, program staff perceived that cultivating diversity is more than reaching out to a particular demographic segment and creating a program to serve it. It is just as much about composing groups of teens who represent a mix of the backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences that make up the larger community. They looked beyond reaching underserved or at-risk audiences or youth from particular partnership schools and organizations and sought instead to engage a broader spectrum of young people.

The result of this shifting perception of diversity is a program model that brings teens from a range of socioeconomic, ethnic, geographic, and academic backgrounds together in the museum for a shared experience. Halbreich and her fellow museum leaders have observed that this model could have sticking power in terms of creating museum cultures that welcome new audiences. For many alumni, much of the value of the program stemmed from working closely and collaboratively with others who were not like themselves.

As one participant explained, “Living in Los Angeles, socioeconomics do matter. . . . They determine the quality of life and the amount of opportunities one will have as a youth. . . . The interaction I had with other teens from different social/cultural backgrounds made me realize that the MOCA program was a microcosm of our society. It nurtured my innate creative abilities and strengths, and it gave me the confidence to better relate to and alter the world around me.”

### **Research Opportunities**

This initiative, the first to examine the impact of intensive teen programs in art museums, opens possibilities for research. By breaking down the divisions between practitioners and researchers, as this study did, practitioners could benefit from more mindful, systematic program reviews, and researchers could likewise benefit from greater focus on the essence of program design and the authenticity of outcomes as they develop studies. An investment in further longitudinal studies would be another important step. Museums’ influence on peoples’ lives and society at large is not revealed by investigations focused on individual experiences with exhibitions or programs. This longitudinal study uncovered a more holistic, integrated understanding of the role of the teen program experience in the lives of alumni. Impact takes time to develop.

This study also suggests possibilities for more innovative data-gathering methods that invite respondents to join in the investigation of impact and, in particular, to represent experiences and impacts that cannot be expressed verbally. There are very few opportunities to reflect on individual museum experiences, and without reflection it is impossible to understand the value of these experiences. Too many studies limit themselves to an investigation of what the museum intended to achieve. This study taught museum practitioners about outcomes and impacts that they had not considered exploring. There is a lot to be learned from paying close attention to the images and meanings as they are presented from the perspective of the participants.

Shifting the research focus from program design details to larger, more robust questions about shared engagement strategies was another important choice for practitioners. Knowing that authentic work in the museum was an essential feature of all four programs was more important than knowing, for instance, if the work should be developing an exhibition, planning a program, or serving on a teen council. This seemingly small change gave practitioners a more compelling way to think and talk about their work, and it expanded their creative thinking about what activities could be part of a successful experience.

From concept to logistics, teens take responsibility for youth-centered events like Teen Night 2013 at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.





### Looking to the Future

To launch this study, the team reviewed formal research and anecdotal information that identified the qualities of effective teen experiences in museums as well as positive youth development practices in other arts organizations. *Powerful Voices*, a report from the Surdna Foundation, concludes that “the best work takes a holistic approach to the creative development of young people, combining a search for significant artistic advancement with purposeful development of individual life skills.””

Intensive teen programs at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Walker Art Center, the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, are fulfilling this promise. This study—grounded in an innovative conceptual foundation and incorporating the introspective and energetic reflections of alumni—documents impressive long-term benefits that can be life-changing. The findings described in this report contain

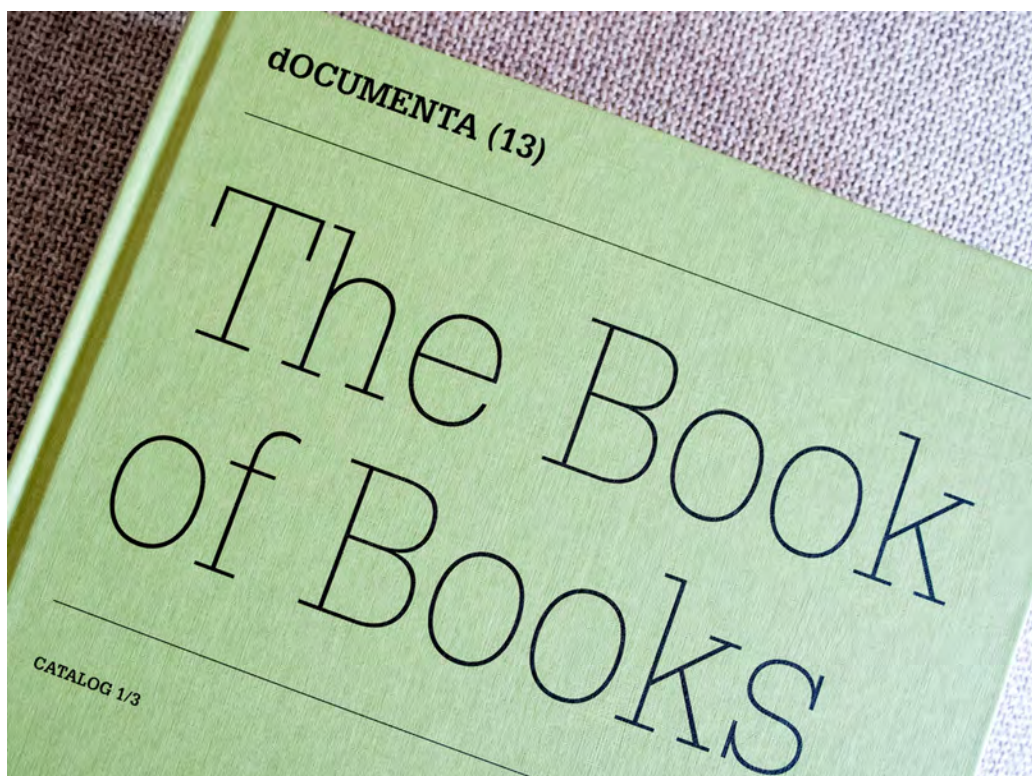
ideas and implications not only for the four museums but for the museum field and the broader arts education community as well.

A variety of online features complement this report and extend its usefulness. Visit [whitney.org/roomtorise](http://whitney.org/roomtorise) for additional information about research methods and findings, case studies, practitioner-researcher reflections, and more.

Museums across the country are doing essential work in engaging adolescents as they move beyond simply getting teens in the front door to offer authentic, transformative experiences for an age group that seeks personal meaning, embraces risk, thrives on peer relationships, and values supportive adult mentors. One of the simplest yet most profound observations about the impact of these programs came from Youth Insights alum Charles Galberth. “The Whitney,” he said, “is always on my shoulder.”

### Alumni Photo Journal Snapshot

CAMH's Teen Council supported **Elizabeth Moran** in her pursuit of education and a career as an artist and educator. She brought this catalogue back from the international art exhibition Documenta in Germany. “The art history classes in my high school rarely discussed anything beyond the 1960s, but the CAMH Teen Council taught me that art ‘history’ is still living, breathing, and constantly changing. Attending Documenta 13 was a wonderful illustration of that early realization.”



# PROGRAM PROFILES





**Whitney Museum of American Art**  
**Youth Insights**  
whitney.org/Education/Teens



Youth Insights teens practice giving tours of Jeff Koons: *A Retrospective* at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Youth Insights (YI) offers teens unprecedented access to art, artists, and the museum, providing a framework for young people to exchange ideas, learn, collaborate, and engage with American art and culture. Through semester-long programs designed around discussing and exploring the Whitney's collections and exhibitions, teens build sustained relationships with artists, museum staff, and a supportive community of peers. Completion of the program makes them eligible for YI Summer Arts Careers, an introduction to arts and museum careers, and YI Leaders, a yearlong paid internship in which teens lead tours, collaborate with artists, and engage a broader youth audience through original programs and events. YI Introductions, a new program launched in 2014, targets New York City immigrant teens who are English language learners.

**Program Facts**

Museum annual operating budget, 2011: \$30 million  
Program start date: 1997

Program annual budget: \$76,500 (excluding salaries)  
Program contact hours per week: 3–10  
Average number served per year: 15 in YI Leaders, 60 in YI Artists, 30 in summer programs (YI Introductions and YI Summer Arts Careers)  
Range of years teens are involved: 2–3  
Total number served, start–2011: 274

**Guiding Philosophy**

Youth Insights is designed around the social, cognitive, and emotional needs of adolescents, providing a safe haven and learning environment at this crucial time in their development. By engaging young people in a dialogue about American art and culture, YI offers teens the opportunity to build an authentic relationship with the museum and artists—something teens embrace because, like artists, they are also experimenting, exploring, and challenging the status quo. Ultimately, YI invites teens to make art an integral part of their lives. Youth development is another important program design element. Participants have real



responsibilities and accountability. They are viewed as museum representatives to other teens and other cultural institutions. The audience for the program has always been racially and ethnically diverse. In its early years, it focused on at-risk youth from underserved audiences. During the 2000s, the program began attracting teens from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds representing the diversity of New York City. Interest in art and the program have become selection criteria.

### **Funding History**

Youth Insights began in 1997 with a four-year \$500,000 matching grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, supplemented by grants from other foundations, including the Louis and Hilda Silverstein Foundation, The Kettering Family Foundation, and The Heckscher Foundation for Children; the Milton & Sally Avery Arts Foundation has been a consistent annual supporter of the program since 2001. Beginning in 2001–02, additional funders took an interest in the program, including The Pinkerton Foundation, The Altman Foundation, Deutsche Bank, and The Ambrose Monell Foundation; each funded the program for consecutive years. YI lost its support from several funders in 2007, coinciding with the economic downturn, but new funders included David Yurman, the Surdna Foundation, and The Keith Haring Foundation. By 2011, previous funding levels had been restored. As part of the Whitney's new building capital campaign, an anonymous challenge grant created a \$1.2 million restricted endowment for the teen program. This challenge was met in just three years, largely through support from individual donors.

### **Program Life Cycle**

- Intergenerational focus (1997–2007). Youth Insights was conceived as an intergenerational program in which teens led seniors, families, and their peers in dialogues about American art and culture. These conversations took place primarily in gallery-based programs, online, at senior centers (2001–04), during teen nights, and with artists. This component was not always effective, however, because teens could not always feel successful; giving inquiry-based tours is difficult, and seniors sometimes felt disrespected having teens as teachers.
- Streamlined structure (2007–2009). By 2007, after a period of frequent staff turnover, the program adopted three strands: Artists in Residence, a semester-long collaboration between teens and a contemporary artist; Contemporary Community, a semester-long teaching program at the Regent Family Residence; and Community Advisory Board, a group that developed programming and tours for teens.
- Tiered structure (2009–present). Today's program structure offers various opportunities for teen engagement, including YI Artists, Leaders, Summer Arts Careers, and,

beginning in 2014, Introductions, a program for English language learners. This tiered approach gives continuing students different ways to be part of the Whitney, with the opportunity for greater engagement and growth over time, a concept that has yielded more benefits for participants. In 2015, staff added a new program area—drop-in programs and events—that gives more teens the chance to have a safe, fun introduction to the museum.

### **Program Assets**

- An ambitious early vision, including core values focused on youth development and community engagement that are still in place
- A strong connection to the Whitney's mission as the “artist's museum”
- Broad institutional buy-in and strong staff leadership, translating to consistent program support and effective program structure and operations as well as a sense of belonging for participants
- Staff commitment to reflective practice, which keeps YI adaptive and flexible
- A diverse group of teens from a cross-section of New York City schools—public, charter, underserved public, and independent
- A lasting impact on program staff, who have started teen programs at other institutions and made professional and personal commitments to teen engagement in museums and youth development in general

### **Program Challenges**

- Frequent staff turnover, which has sometimes created instability
- A period of fluctuating funding from 2007 to 2011 as a result of the economic downturn

### **Staff Patterns**

Program coordinators and assistants have held master's and bachelor's degrees in art history, art education, visual and performing arts, or American studies. Although not all of them had prior experience working with teens, most had worked as art educators in museums or schools. Often, staff members have their own art practices and are interested in community engagement. Staff in 2014 consisted of a program director, a coordinator, and a program assistant.

**Walker Art Center  
Teen Arts Council**

[blogs.walkerart.org/teens/about-teen-programs/](https://blogs.walkerart.org/teens/about-teen-programs/)



Walker Art Center Teen Arts Council members are welcomed as museum insiders.

Walker Art Center Teen Programs support interactive connections to contemporary art and artists of our time. They provide and co-create platforms and resources with young people to ask complex questions, voice ideas and opinions, and explore critical and creative potential. The centerpiece of Walker Teen Programs is the Walker Art Center Teen Arts Council (WACTAC), a diverse group of 12 to 14 high school student artists and art enthusiasts who meet weekly to design, organize, and market events and programs for other teenagers and young adults. Using Walker exhibitions, films, and performances as inspiration, WACTAC creates a variety of related programs that connect teens to contemporary art and artists.

**Program Facts**

Museum annual operating budget, 2011: \$15 million–  
\$20 million  
Program start date: 1996

Program annual budget: \$106,000  
Program contact hours per week: 2.5  
Average number served per year: 12–14  
Range of years teens are involved: 1–3  
Total number served, start–2011: 136

**Guiding Philosophy**

Founded on the core belief that the museum can be a place of transformation and growth for youth, WACTAC was established as a safe and welcoming space for teens. It was the inspiration of former director Kathy Halbreich, who recalled the influence of art in her own adolescence and made teens an integral part of the Walker's vision to deeply engage communities in the museum. Open dialogue about challenging issues, freedom to ask difficult questions, and immersion in contemporary aesthetic experiences are hallmarks of teen involvement. Programs are youth-directed, with projects, programs, and publications shaped to fit the



concerns of each year's Teen Arts Council. This philosophy permeates the program and contributes to a museumwide atmosphere of respect and support for teens.

### **Funding History**

Support over the years from the Best Buy Foundation, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the McKnight Foundation, the Northwest Area Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Surdna Foundation, the Wallace Foundation, and other sources has enabled the Walker to build, sustain, and share this successful model with other institutions. The McKnight Foundation supported the Adolescent Think Tank, which informed the initial framework, and the Surdna Foundation provided funding to launch the program in 1996 and has supported Walker teen engagement efforts ever since. Wells Fargo has sponsored the program since 2007 and underwrites free gallery admission for teens.

### **Program Life Cycle**

- Research and development (1990–94). Beginning in 1990 with a three-phase study that provided the foundation for the program, the museum held informal, low-commitment activities to allow staff and researchers to get a feel for how the program might be organized. The Adolescent Think Tank was the core project, along with partnerships with several local schools and a highly visible interpretive artist-led initiative called The Listening Project.
- Growth (1994–2000). In 1994, the Education and Community Programs department officially started teen programs. Over the next few years, the department continued to provide workshops and added artist residencies and artist talks for young people. Staff also worked closely with Minneapolis South High School. In 1996, the program saw significant growth, particularly with the formation of WACTAC. The number of annual events went from several to more than a dozen, many programmed by WACTAC. Added to the residencies and lectures were open houses, a zine, classes, and other projects.
- Maturity (2000–06). The program expanded both in size and scope, with many events held away from the Walker. Off-site festivals were programmed to engage the community at large. At the museum, the students began to organize exhibitions and film festivals and to commission new work from artists.
- Transition and rebuilding (2006–present). Following the departure of the director and longtime staff members, the museum explored ways to configure and refresh a program that had been associated so closely with their leadership. Community partner relationships have been reestablished, new opportunities have been launched, and youth interest has grown steadily.

### **Program Assets**

- Stable program staff leadership and staunch advocates at all levels of the museum, with director of education and curator of public practice Sarah Schultz as the key spokesperson through 2014
- A strong Twin Cities art scene and a historical local commitment to the arts and the area's young people
- Enthusiastic investment in the program by teen participants
- Consistent funding from private and corporate foundations as well as ongoing institutional commitment

### **Program Challenges**

- Staff departures from 2006 to 2010 and an accompanying loss of institutional memory and community relationships
- Diminished budgets during the 2008 economic downturn

### **Staff Patterns**

The program has had five managers—three in the first 18 years and two since 2010. In the museum context, this is low turnover. As of 2015, staff consisted of one full-time coordinator.

**Contemporary Arts Museum Houston**  
**Teen Council**  
camh.org/programs-education/teen-council



The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's biennial *Perspectives* exhibitions feature new work by young Houston-area artists. The Teen Council selects the theme, title, and guest juror and helps with design, installation, printed exhibition catalogue, and programming.

The CAMH Teen Council is a group of motivated young people ages 15 to 19 who are committed to bringing the art of their time to their peers. Teen Council exposes members to the vibrant field of contemporary art and acts as a highly collaborative creative incubator that opens opportunities for leadership, visual literacy, and life skill development. During weekly meetings, the group is introduced to the inner workings of the museum and to the dynamic Houston arts community. Teen Council members decide on activities, which change from year to year. Past events include art markets, exhibitions, fashion shows, film screenings, listening parties, music festivals, and poetry readings.

#### **Program Facts**

Museum annual operating budget, 2011: \$1 million–\$5 million  
Program start date: 1999  
Program annual budget: \$80,000  
Program contact hours per week: 1  
Average number served per year: 24  
Range of years teens are involved: 1–2  
Total number served, start–2011: 236

#### **Guiding Philosophy**

The museum's goal for Teen Council is to build on adolescents' natural affinity for issues and themes in

contemporary art by bringing them into direct contact with the artists who create it. The program gives them behind-the-scenes experience at an accredited art institution. Ultimately, it solidifies in participants a lifelong commitment to advocacy for contemporary art and its place in society. Seldom are young people offered this kind of in-depth and meaningful experience, at no cost to them, in a program closely linked to their school and community. After experimenting with a larger group of participants, the museum has returned to its original intent: to be a welcoming, interactive, peer-directed environment that is different from a traditional classroom.

### **Funding History**

Teen Council has been supported by grants from foundations, corporations, and individuals. The Baker Hughes Foundation was a consistent funder through 2012. In 2013–14, the program was supported by Ms. Louisa Stude Sarofim, Texas Women for the Arts, and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

### **Program Life Cycle**

- Building (1999–04). Based on early success, Teen Council membership grew from eight to 31 members. In this expanded program, coordinators found it more difficult to hold teens accountable for their responsibilities in group events and activities.
- Stabilization (2005–present). The council was reduced to 19 participants in 2005 and 15 in 2010, its current size. Core events were codified and remain intact. During this phase, however, the Teen Council coordinator changed four times.
- Strong programming (2006–08). Teen Council members came from more than 15 high schools in different parts of the city. Council-developed programs included a poetry and performance event, a fashion show, a battle of the bands, dance competitions, exhibitions, and partnerships with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, film department.

### **Program Assets**

- An innovative curriculum not offered by any other Houston institution
- A response to the need left by drastic cuts in art education in Texas public schools
- Meaningful programming under the guidance of caring, nurturing adults—a safety net and afterschool alternative that offers a creative outlet for teens' ideas, energy, and emotions

### **Program Challenges**

- A program expansion to serve more students that proved ineffective

- Consistently attracting participants who are diverse in ethnicity, economic class, geography, and talent
- Balancing the need for freedom and structure for participants
- Meeting participants' goals while competing with their schedules, which are already busy with academic responsibilities and extracurricular activities

### **Staff Patterns**

The Teen Council was initially staffed by the museum's director of education and a full-time coordinator. It is now run by a full-time coordinator and a part-time assistant coordinator.



### The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA)

#### MOCA Teen program

(Previously the MOCA and Louis Vuitton Young Arts Program, the MOCA Apprenticeship Program and MOCA Mentors) [moca.org/education/teens](http://moca.org/education/teens)



MOCA teens say working with and learning from each other is a major benefit.

The MOCA teen program is a paid internship for juniors and seniors in high school to learn about the work of the museum by directly involving them in it. This diverse group of students meets weekly at MOCA to work with museum professionals, investigate current exhibitions, make art, plan the museum's popular annual Teen Night, and support one another on a journey of self-discovery. Teens come from culturally, geographically, and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds; they learn from one another by working collaboratively on all of their projects and by staffing education programs together. The program originated as MOCA Mentors in 1992 at the urging of local high school students close to the museum's downtown location. In 1999, the participants chose to rename it the MOCA Apprenticeship Program, and in 2012, it was expanded and rebranded as the MOCA and Louis Vuitton Young Arts Program.

#### Program Facts

Museum annual operating budget, 2011:  
\$15 million–\$20 million  
Program start date: 1992  
Program annual budget: \$100,000  
Program contact hours per week: 2.5  
Average number served per year: 13  
Range of years teens are involved: 1–3  
Total number served, start–2011: 250

#### Guiding Philosophy

The program aims to empower teens while educating them about contemporary art, museums, and related careers by providing real work experiences in a professional setting. Key program strategies include recruiting a diverse group of students, creating a cohesive team through

collaborative work projects, and using inquiry-based methods to engage critically with contemporary art. Participants have ownership of program activities and engage in reflective practice, leading to the continual evolution of an emergent curriculum driven by the teens' ideas. Originally the program was created at the request of students to increase the impact of school outreach efforts, and it grew steadily as participants' involvement with the museum increased, eventually becoming paid positions. Over time, staffing education events, planning Teen Night, and working closely with professional artists became central to the curriculum. The teens serve as ambassadors between the museum and their communities.

### **Funding History**

From 1992 until 2008, the program had diverse streams of funding from city and county agencies, corporations, and foundations, including the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, the Claire and Theodore Morse Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, Good Works Foundation, and The MOCA Projects Council. The MOCA Projects Council. From 2012 to 2015, the program was generously supported by Louis Vuitton.

### **Program Life Cycle**

MOCA Mentors and MOCA Apprenticeship Program (1992). Responding to interest from local teens, the program gave participants access to resources and empowered them to serve as mentors to their classmates. Early participants came from high schools involved in museum outreach programs and had been identified as creative and/or struggling to stay in school. Students met with staff, interacted with artists, worked on museum projects, organized their own exhibition in a local gallery, and painted a mural sponsored by a downtown bank.

- Paid internships (1990s). Teens gained a higher degree of investment in the institution, a sense of prestige associated with their position, and what was for many a much-needed source of income. Because teens needed immigration documentation in order to be eligible, however, the program became inaccessible to some undocumented students who might otherwise have participated.
- Teen Night (2003). Apprentices' responsibilities increased after they decided to host the first annual Teen Night. As this event grew more popular, developing event-planning and communication skills became more central to the curriculum, and participants faced challenges and opportunities related to creating ambitious, large-scale events.
- Restructuring (2008–11). MOCA's commitment to the program was steady through the economic downturn, continuing through major staff cutbacks. The program

proved to be a scalable model that can withstand financial hardship.

- New name and sponsor (2012–2015). Rebranded the MOCA and Louis Vuitton Young Arts Program
- The program continues to evolve, providing authentic, meaningful experiences that deepen teens' relationships to the museum, contemporary art, and artists.

### **Program Assets**

- Strong leadership by department directors and program staff, ensuring the organic, responsive evolution of the program
- Program staff autonomy to create and carry out an emergent curriculum that responds to participants' needs
- A student-centered curriculum that empowers youth by engaging them in authentic work experiences, collaborative projects, and reflective practice
- An avenue for cultivating new audiences and the museum's role as a community cultural asset

### **Program Challenges**

- Fostering cohesive relationships and equal participation among diverse participants
- Teens' challenges beyond the program in family, school, and personal life, affecting student participation and available staff resources
- Los Angeles's sprawling geography, which makes transportation to the museum difficult for some participants

### **Staff Patterns**

Combinations of part-time and full-time staff have always shared program coordination responsibilities. There has never been a staff coordinator dedicated solely to the program.









Teen Nights planned by the Walker Art Center Teen Arts Council show teens that museums and art can be synonymous with play and fun.

# NOTES



1. A literature review (see [whitney.org/roomtorise](http://whitney.org/roomtorise)) revealed that some science museums had conducted substantive long-term evaluations of their teen programs, but few art museums had carried out similar investigations.
2. Judy Diamond, Mark St. John, Beth Cleary, and Darlene Librero, "The Exploratorium's Explainer Program: The Long-Term Impacts on Teenagers of Teaching Science to the Public," *Science Education* 71, no. 5 (1987): 643–656; Youth Programs, Association of Science-Technology Centers Resource Center, [astc.org/resource/youth/](http://astc.org/resource/youth/).
3. For a discussion of strategic priorities for increasing the sustainability and impact of creative youth development programs, see *Setting the Agenda*, a research report commissioned for the National Summit on Creative Youth Development (Massachusetts Cultural Council, 2014), [creativyouthsummit.org/documents/National%20Creative%20Youth%20Development%20Summit%20Briefing.pdf](http://creativyouthsummit.org/documents/National%20Creative%20Youth%20Development%20Summit%20Briefing.pdf). See also the Wallace Foundation's *Something to Say*, a research report on high-quality afterschool arts programs for urban youth: [wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/arts-education/Community-Approaches-to-Building-Arts-Education/Pages/Something-to-Say-Success-Principles-for-Afterschool-Arts-Programs.aspx](http://wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/arts-education/Community-Approaches-to-Building-Arts-Education/Pages/Something-to-Say-Success-Principles-for-Afterschool-Arts-Programs.aspx)
4. For more about this phase of the study, along with full outcome definitions and summaries of the literature reviews, see [whitney.org/roomtorise](http://whitney.org/roomtorise).
5. Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project, [www.byaep.com](http://www.byaep.com); *Fuel: Giving Youth the Power to Succeed* (Chicago: Marwen, 2004), [marwen.org/about/publications/arts-education](http://marwen.org/about/publications/arts-education); Surdna Foundation, *Powerful Voices: Developing High-Impact Arts Programs for Teens* (New York: Surdna, 2002), [surdna.org/what-we-fund/thriving-cultures/thriving-cultures-resources/38-powerful-voices.html](http://surdna.org/what-we-fund/thriving-cultures/thriving-cultures-resources/38-powerful-voices.html).
6. *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development: Report Brief* (National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2005), [nap.edu/catalog/10022/community-programs-to-promote-youth-development](http://nap.edu/catalog/10022/community-programs-to-promote-youth-development).
7. National Endowment for the Arts, *How a Nation Engages with Art: Highlights from the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, September 2013, [arts.gov/publications/highlights-from-2012-sppa](http://arts.gov/publications/highlights-from-2012-sppa), 10.
8. Center for the Future of Museums, *Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums* (Washington, DC: American Alliance of Museums, 2011), 12.
9. Walker Art Center, *A Teen Programs How-To Kit* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), [media.walkerart.org/pdf/wac\\_teen\\_kit\\_booklet.pdf](http://media.walkerart.org/pdf/wac_teen_kit_booklet.pdf).
10. Mary Ellen Munley, "Raising the Bar: Aiming for Public Value," *Journal of Museum Education* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 22.
11. Surdna Foundation, foreword to *Powerful Voices* (see n. 5).

Teens at the Whitney are ambassadors for the museum, planning events, leading tours, and assisting with programs.







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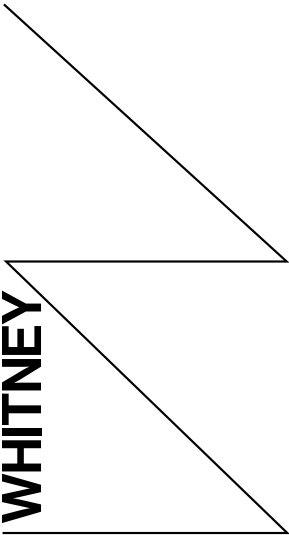
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